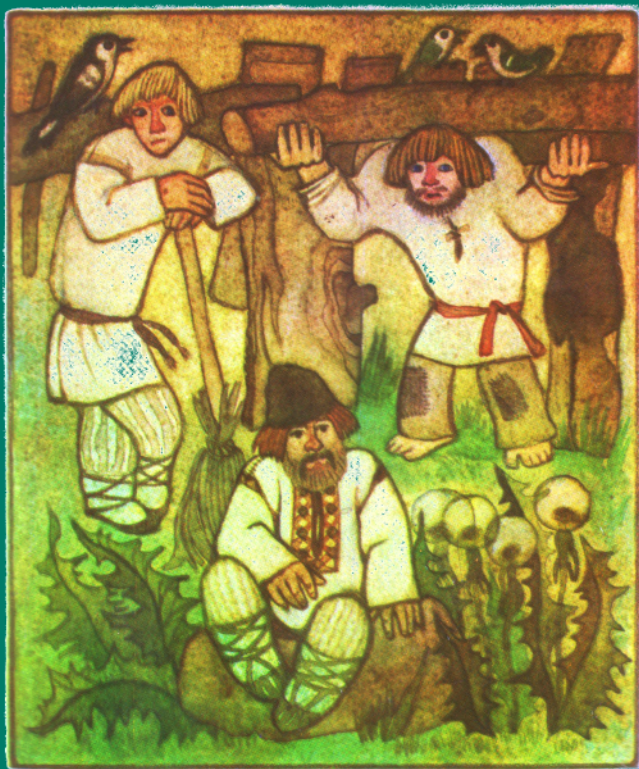


ANDREI the mastermind



MINSK YUNATSTVA PUBLISHERS 1986

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Byelorussian Folk Tales

Illustrated by N. POPLAVSKAYA



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THE MAGIC FLUTE



Whether this happened long ago, or not so long ago, whether it was really so or not, who can say? Nobody knows for certain now.

So we shall tell the story that the grand-dads told their grandchildren, and those grandchildren — their grandchildren.

There was once a country in a distant part of the world where the people lived in peace and in plenty. They had much land and to spare. They did not interfere with one another, and if anyone happened to be in trouble, his fellow-men would help him to overcome his difficulties.

But there came a time when a most dreadful Serpent flew out of nowhere into this part of the world. It became a habit with him to fly over and steal the people's goods and carry them away to his den.

He stole such a lot of these goods — but where



to store them? His den wasn't large enough! He thought of building himself a castle. But he didn't know how to do it and was a lazybones into the bargain. He wasn't used to working. He took to seizing people and carrying them off to his kingdom.

Those people had to build the castle for the Serpent. They had to dig deep ditches, put up high embankments. And his servants, the stewards and henchmen, he ordered they should beat and punish the people mercilessly.

Day and night the people laboured for the Serpent. They lived in poverty, cursed their bitter fate, died before their time.

The Serpent continued to capture ever more and more people, who with their hard labour built him a countless number of castles, laid roads to connect them, put up strong fences to enclose them.

The people became swollen with hunger, like flies they died. Things became worse as time went on. There was no escaping the Serpent.

But there came a time when the Serpent was old and weak, and lay hardly breathing. He could no longer capture people and grab their goods from them.

By this time the Serpent's servants — his stewards and henchmen — had themselves become landlords and were beginning to creep out from



the Serpent's castles and hunt people. Life now under the landlords became even worse for the people than it had been under the old and weak Serpent. And nowhere to hide from them — they had overrun the country.

To differ somehow from the people, the landlords thought up various new names and nicknames for themselves. Some called themselves "Wolf", some "Bear", or by the names of other animals; some "Hawk", "Raven" after birds, and some named themselves after trees. That's how the landlords became "Wolves", "Pigmen", "Aspenins", while the plain people were called by only one name — "Cattle".

The people served the sickly Serpent, they served their landlords and gave them all they had to the very last of their possessions. In hunger and in cold they lived and worked, of the world they saw nothing.

Such was their life. Some died, others were born, but life never became easier for them. Nor did anybody know what to do to change things for the better.

And then a boy was born in that country, a weakling he was. His health never improved. He was so weak and ill that even the landlords did not bother him. They didn't even drive him to work for them — nobody wanted him.



He grew up, became older, but he played only with the children, as if he were still a child. And the people nicknamed him Ivan the Simpleton.

In winter Ivan the Simpleton sat on top of the stove and made toys out of splinters, in summer he played with the sand in the front yard of his hut.

One day three old men appeared in the village where Ivan the Simpleton lived. Wherever they entered they found empty huts, not a living soul anywhere: the landlords had driven everybody off to work.

The old men noticed Ivan and came into the yard to rest awhile.

They sat, rested, filled their pipes with tobacco, searched in their pockets for a flint to strike up a light, but no one had a flint.

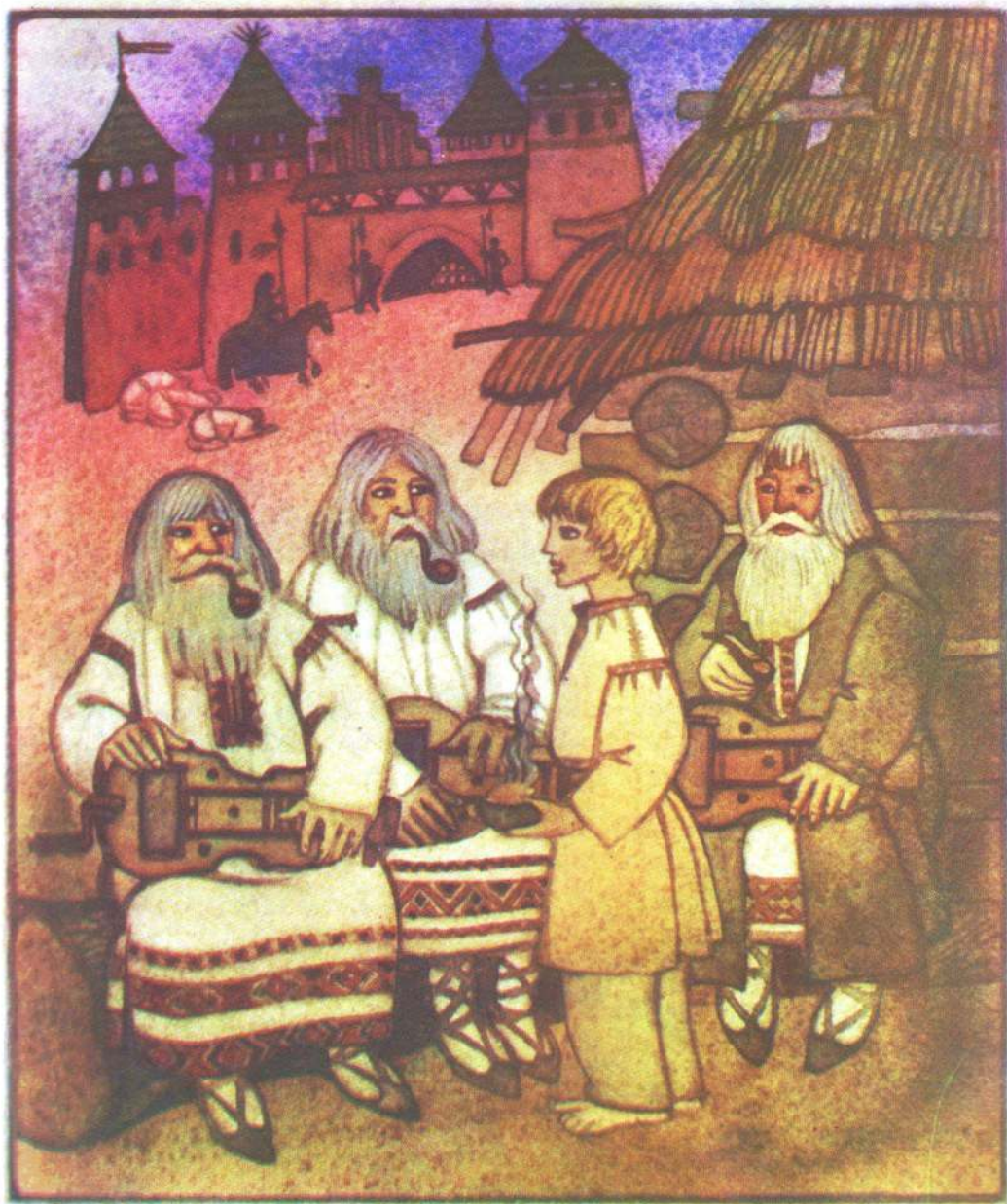
The old men asked Ivan for a flint. Ivan went into the hut, took some hot coals from the hearth and brought them to the old men.

The old men lit their pipes, thanked Ivan and asked him what he did at home all day.

"I take a handful of sand here and pour it from one spot to another," was Ivan's answer. "Whatever I did would go to the landlord anyway — so it makes no difference what I do."

The old men listened to Ivan, shook their heads, took up their lyres and began to play — loud and rich was their playing.





The first time they played they gave wisdom to Ivan. The second time they played they gave him a talent for words and music. The third time they played they filled his heart with anger against the landlords.

The old men left. Ivan felt his thoughts becoming clearer, he felt anger seething in his heart against the landlords.

He began fixing up his things to leave. He was going to see the world. He made a flute, such a cheerful one, that when he played on it, not only the people but also the birds and animals listened.

Ivan began walking about among the people, playing on his magic flute, telling them the truth about the Serpent and his henchmen.

The people's eyes were beginning to open to the reality. They saw that the world is full of great wrongs: some lord it over the people, others know only grief; some have no end of wealth, and others die of hunger.

Wherever Ivan came, the people there began to think and reason and do as he taught — they grabbed up their pitchforks and axes and fought the landlords.

The landlords had but one thing on their minds now: how to rid the world of Ivan. They gathered an army and started off in search of Ivan.

They hear a voice coming from the east — they



rush off there. Sabres ring, a forest of pikes rises, guns thunder! But where is Ivan? Not there!

The landlords and their army stop to listen. Suddenly they hear a voice coming from the west... It's Ivan's flute playing, calling the people to rise and fight their great battle. It's only an echo rolling on from village to village, from country to country.

The landlords rush off to the west. Their horses fly like the wind, their sabres ring, their guns thunder, but where is Ivan? Nobody knows.

And ever since then the Serpent's stewards and henchmen know no peace. No sooner do they hear the flute playing, than they get scared to death, they await disaster as the ox the whip.

But the flute still whistles, the flute still plays, and the echo rolls on throughout the world, gathering people.

You cannot catch him, guns cannot kill him. He breaks his way through everywhere. He knows no barriers.

The flute plays and plays, and when the time comes all the landlords will be wiped out.



THE GREEDY RICH MAN



Once upon a time there lived two brothers, one a rich man, the other a poor one. The rich brother, having very many serfs, never did any work. While the poor brother would take his fishing-rod and go fishing in the lake to make his living.

The day came when the rich man's son got married and his father made a fine wedding-party. Many guests arrived to attend it.

"I'll go to the wedding-party, too," thought the poor brother. With a loaf of bread that he borrowed from his neighbours, off he went to the wedding.

On seeing his poor brother with a loaf of bread, the rich brother didn't let him cross the threshold.

"What has brought you here? My guests are not for the like of you! Off with you!"

And he drove him away.

The poor brother was hurt to the quick. He took



his fishing-rod and went to the lake. Soon his old boat was in the middle of the lake. There he sat all day, fishing, but caught only some small fry.

Dusk was falling. "Well," thought the poor fisherman, "I'll try my luck just once more." He cast the line and caught so amazing a fish he had never seen in all his life — how large she was and all silvery. To see this wonderful fish was to marvel! And how happy it made him! He was about to stuff the fish into his bag, when all of a sudden she spoke up in a human voice:

"Don't kill me, good man, let me go back into the lake."

The fisherman thought of his own children and said:

"I can't let you go — I am hungry myself and it's a long time since my children have had anything to eat. How can I return home empty-handed?"

"If you are so poor, I'll help you," the fish said. "Put your hand into my mouth and take a gold ring there."

The fisherman thought a while and said:

"I'm afraid you can bite my hand off!"

"Oh! Don't be afraid! I won't bite it off!"

The fisherman plucked up his courage, stuck his hand into the mouth of the fish and pulled out the gold ring.



“What shall I do with it?” asked the fisherman. “This ring won’t feed me.”

“Don’t worry!” answered the fish. “It will feed you very well indeed! Empty your boat of the small fry and then throw the ring into it.”

No sooner said than done! Hardly had the fisherman put the gold ring on the bottom of the boat, when he saw a pile of money there.

The poor fisherman let the fish go and quickly made for the shore. On the bank he took off his shirt, tied up all the money in it and betook himself homeward.

From that day on the poor brother lived in clover. He built a new house and invited guests to his house-warming party. But the rich brother was not invited, for his poor brother couldn’t forgive the offence.

When the rich man learned that his poor brother had built a new house and was holding a merry feast, said he to his son:

“Go and see what they are doing there.”

The boy hurried off to his uncle’s house, saw the feast and ran back home.

“Oh, my!” he said to his father. “You haven’t got anything to compare with what your poor brother has! A new house, and plenty of cattle, and the dinner table groaning with the best of things to eat and drink!”



The rich man burst with envy. Now he sent his son to invite the poor brother over to their house.

Came the poor brother to the rich brother.

“How did you manage to make such a fortune?” the rich brother wanted to know. “People say you are doing better than I have ever done.”

The poor brother never lied and he related everything as it had occurred.

On hearing the story the rich man felt his hands itching. “I’ll go and catch that fish too,” he thought.

He took one of his best fishing-rods, got into a boat and was soon in the middle of the lake. He angled there, and believe it or not! — he finally caught the wonderful fish!

“Don’t kill me!” said the fish in a human voice. “Let me go back into the water. I’ve got many children there and they are so small yet!”

“No, my dear,” said the rich man in reply. “Not yet! First give me a ring just like the one you gave to that poor brother of mine.”

“But your brother was so poor that he didn’t even have a piece of bread in the house... But you... Do you really need the ring?”

“Do I need it? Of course, I do! I don’t want my brother to be richer than I am! Give me the ring



right away! If you don't, I'll take you home and fry you."

"So be it!" said the fish. "Take the ring, if you are so greedy. I don't object."

And the fish opened her mouth as wide as she could. The greedy rich man thrust his arm into her mouth up to the very elbow. The fish bit his arm off with her sharp teeth and dived down to the bottom of the lake.

The rich brother returned home without money and without his arm. And it served him right!



ANDREI

THE MASTERMIND



There lived Andrei, a most interesting fellow. He wished to know everything. Wherever he looked, whatever he saw, everything aroused his curiosity — he would ask questions about anything. Storm-clouds are floating in the sky... Where do they come from? Where are they bound for? There is a river beyond the village... Where is the water flowing to? The forest stands... Who planted it? Why do birds have wings and fly freely wherever they like, whereas man has no wings?

People answered his questions again and again until they just had no idea how to answer them.

So they began to laugh at him.

“You, Andrei, wish to become a mastermind, but don’t you see that a man can’t know everything?”

Andrei refused to agree with them. Why couldn’t a man know everything?



Said he:

"I'll go to the Sun himself. He shines over the whole world. He sees everything and knows everything. The Sun will tell me what I do not yet know."

He left his home and went in search of the place where the Sun spends his nights.

He walked and walked and suddenly he saw a man sitting on a stone at the roadside. The man would ask all the passers-by one and the same question: "How long shall I have to sit here?"

Like all the others, Andrei had no answer for him.

He went on walking. And lo! a man was propping up a fence with his shoulders!

"Whatever are you doing, man?" Andrei said. "Why on earth are you propping up that fence?"

"I have no idea... Perhaps you can tell me."

"If I knew I wouldn't be searching for the one who knows everything," Andrei replied and went on his way.

He had not gone far when he saw a man raking some sweepings on the ground.

"Man, what are you raking those sweepings for?"

"I have no idea."

"Neither have I," Andrei said and went on his way.





Whether his way was long or short nobody knows, but he found himself in a large forest. He threaded his way through it all day long and towards evening approached a clearing. And here a sudden dazzling light that came from the clearing blinded him. When he at last opened his eyes he saw the Sun's palace blazing like fire nearby. He could not see properly, so dazzling was the light. He had to grope his way into the palace. And there seated in an armchair was the Sun's old mother.

"What brings you here?" she asked.

Andrei bowed to her and said:

"I've come to see the Sun and ask him questions about things."

"What things?"

"Things I myself have no idea about."

"And what is it you have no idea about?"

Andrei started telling her. The old woman listened and listened till she began to yawn.

"All right," she said, "but wait a while till my son comes back for the night. And in the meantime I had better take a nap: I feel rather tired after a long day."

Andrei left the palace, made a fire and began to roast pieces of salted pork fat, holding them on a skewer over the fire. He felt hungry after his long journey.



He ate his fill of the bread and salted pork fat. Now he felt thirsty. He went to the river and bent down to drink.

Lo and behold! a maiden was rising from the bottom of the river. She was so beautiful that he could not take his eyes off her. And the maiden stared at him.

“Don’t drink from the river,” she warned him, “if you do, the Sun will scorch you to death.”

“But I’m very thirsty.”

“Follow me.”

The maiden led him to an old oak. From under its roots crystal-clear cold water was spouting.

Andrei lay down prone on the ground and drank his fill of the spring water. In the meantime the Sun began to descend from the sky to his chambers. Andrei knew it was time he went to meet the Sun, but he could not part with the beautiful maiden.

“Don’t by any means mention to the Sun that you’ve seen me,” the maiden said, and flew upward into the sky and shone there as a bright star.

Andrei betook himself to the palace. So scorching hot was the Sun that the palace walls even began to crackle. But Andrei did not mind the heat — because of the spring water he had just drunk, the Sun was powerless to harm him. He only pulled his cap down over his eyes to protect them.



He told the Sun why he had come.

Said the Sun:

"To teach you I have no time. But I can help you to become wise. Then you will know everything yourself."

Saying this, the Sun bunched all his rays into one and directed it into Andrei's head. Andrei immediately felt his head become clear, his thoughts lucid. At the same time his head felt as if it were aflame, and his heart turned ice-cold...

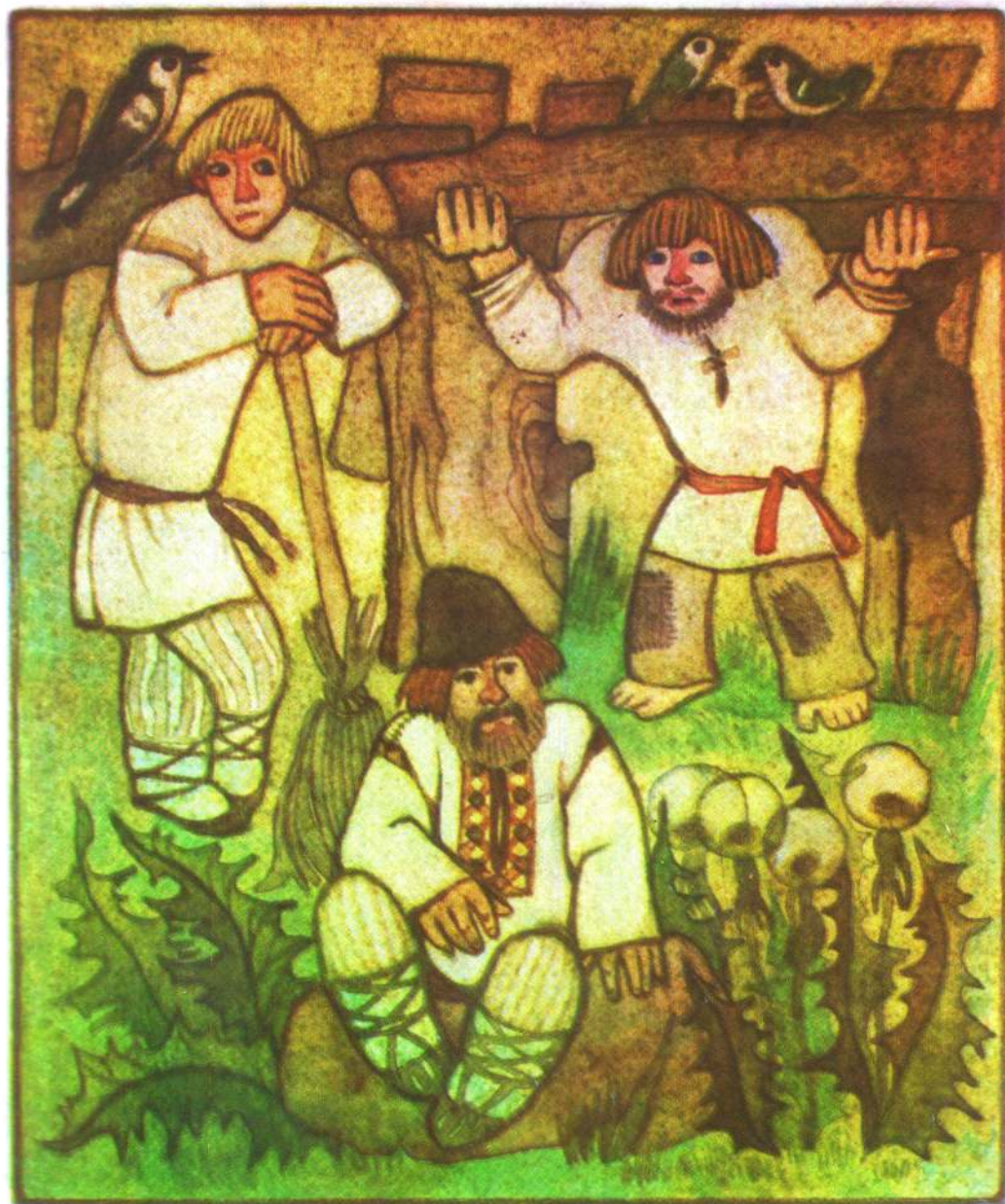
He left the palace and his cold heart distressed him. He suddenly thought of the young maiden and he was seized with such a great desire to see her again that his head grew dizzy. He began calling to her. The bright star fell from the sky and turned into the beautiful maiden. As soon as Andrei looked at her he at once felt that his heart was as warm as it had been before.

He took the maiden by the hand and the two of them made their way to his native land. And he was so happy now that he did not even envy the birds their wings.

They came upon the man who was busy raking the sweepings. Andrei looked at him and the truth dawned on him.

"You're trying to find some lost coins in the sweepings," he said to the man, "and you're just wasting time. You'd better begin to work. It





will take you less time to earn that money than you are spending on trying to find those lost coins.”

The man listened to reason. He gave up his useless occupation, began working and soon earned enough to start a farm of his own and have money to spend.

The young people went on walking and came across the man who stood propping up a fence with his shoulders. Andrei looked at him and said:

“You needn’t support something that has rotted away. You had better make a new fence.”

The man listened to the advice and put up a new fence in place of the old rotten one.

The two young people came up to the man sitting on the stone having no idea how long he would have to stay there. Andrei said to him:

“Don’t be so selfish, man. Let other wayfarers sit upon the stone.”

Andrei made him come off the stone and the two young people sat down on it. And the man ran joyfully homeward.

The young couple rested a little and went on their way to Andrei’s homeland.

Ever since then it is the people who put questions. And it is Andrei who answers them.

And so he is known as Andrei the mastermind of all mankind.



IVAN OUTWITS THE DEVILS



There lived once upon a time an old man and an old woman and they had three sons. They were poor and lived from hand to mouth.

The old woman died, and before long the old man felt his own death hour was nigh. He called his sons to him, and said:

"I haven't managed to make a fortune, but even the little I have will be divided among you."

So he gave his yellow tom-cat to the eldest son, his millstones to the second son, and Ivan, the youngest of the brothers, got a bundle of bast to make sandals with.

The old man distributed his belongings, and died.

Soon afterwards the brothers began to think how to earn a living for themselves.

The eldest brother took his yellow tom-cat under his arm and set out on his travels.



He walked and walked until night overtook him on the way. He came to a house and asked for a night's lodging.

"Oh, good man!" said the owner of the house. "You may stay overnight, but, you see, our house is overrun with mice and rats, and we can hardly defend ourselves when they attack us. You are fresh for them, and they will surely eat you up!"

"Never fear!" said the traveller. "I'll manage somehow to sleep the night through."

Then all the family climbed up onto their sleeping-benches, and as for the traveller, he lay down on the floor together with his cat.

Next morning the family awoke, and lo and behold! a pile of dead mice and rats on the floor! And near the traveller purring softly a strange yellow creature was sitting.

In that country there had never been any cats, so the people were quite ignorant of such a creature as a cat.

They began pleading with the traveller:

"Please, dear man, sell us your little creature!"

"No," said the traveller, "this little creature is not for sale!"

Then the Tsar of that land was told about the wonderful little yellow creature. He called the traveller to his palace and asked him to stay there overnight. When the Tsar awoke the next day and



saw that the cat had choked such a pile of mice and rats, he could hardly believe his eyes.

“Take whatever you wish,” said the Tsar, “only sell us your little creature!”

“Alright!” agreed the traveller. “Cover my cat with silver coins, and you can have him.”

What could the Tsar do but agree?

The traveller took his cat and made him stand on his hind paws.

“Now, Your Majesty, shower your silver coins on him!”

The Tsar used all his silver to cover the cat with.

Then the traveller collected the silver coins, and set off homewards.

Before long he started a farm of his own, got married and began to live happily.

The second brother also wanted to go and seek his fortune. One day he said:

“I feel like going out into the wide, wide world with my millstones. Maybe they’ll bring me luck!”

He took his millstones under his arm and set out on his travels. He walked and walked until night overtook him on the way. Close by the forest he noticed a hut. The traveller went in and found nobody there. He climbed up onto a



sleeping-bench with his millstones, and soon was fast asleep.

At night a gang of robbers burst into the hut. They emptied their pockets and began to divide the money among themselves.

In the meantime the traveller, as he turned over accidentally, pushed his millstones. They fell down with a terrific crash. The robbers frightened half to death took to their heels and left the booty in the hut.

The traveller got down from his sleeping-bench, took all the money and went home.

Soon afterwards the second brother also began living well.

The youngest, Ivan by name, on seeing how prosperous his brothers had become, said:

“Seems it’s high time to try my luck too!”

He took his bast and went out into the wide world. He walked and walked until his sandals got worn out. He sat down on a tussock amid a swamp and began to cut bast strips for a new pair of sandals.

Suddenly a devil jumped out of the swamp. He watched Ivan a while, and then said:

“What are you doing here, Ivan?”

“Can’t you see for yourself? I’m making a rope.”

“But what for?”



"To pull you devils out of the swamp and then sell at the market. There are plenty of your folks here, so I'll make enough money to build myself a new house."

"Wait, Ivan, stop doing this! Take whatever you wish, but only don't pull us out of our swamp!"

"Fill my hat with gold — and I'll leave you in peace!"

The devil dived into the swamp. In the meantime Ivan dug a deep hole in the ground and placed his seedy hat upon it.

Soon the devil reappeared, carrying a sack full of gold. He emptied the sack into Ivan's hat, but the coins did not cover even its bottom. He shook his head, and then brought another sack with gold. Somehow the hat was filled at last.

"Now lift your hat!" the devil said to Ivan. "And I'll help you if it's too heavy!"

"Never mind!" Ivan answered. "I'll manage to do it myself!"

But the devil insisted Ivan should lift the hat in his presence.

So Ivan lifted his hat, and the devil saw the hole filled with gold coins.

"That'll never do!" said the devil getting angry. "You've deceived me! I'll go to the chief of the devils — he'll say what must be done!"





He went to the chief devil and told him everything. The latter, to make short work of Ivan, sent Powerful, his strongest, devil to him.

Powerful jumped out of the swamp and said to Ivan:

“Let’s wrestle together! The one who overpowers the other wins all the gold. Agreed?”

Ivan looked at him. “It won’t be easy to overpower you,” he thought to himself.

Nonetheless Ivan did not show he was frightened. He looked around and saw a bear lying under a fir-tree.

“You see,” said Ivan, “I think that after our wrestling bout you’ll be on your last legs. So you’d better wrestle with my old grand-dad first. There he is, under the fir-tree. Go and measure your strength with him.”

The devil ran up to the bear.

“Hi, you, old bones! Let’s wrestle!”

The bear stood up, grabbed the devil and began to mash him with his strong paws. The devil escaped by the skin of his teeth, and went running to the chief devil to tell him how awfully strong Ivan’s grandfather was.

Then Speedy, the best runner, was sent to Ivan by the chief devil.

He jumped out of the swamp and said to Ivan:



“Let’s run a race. The one who outstrips the other wins all the gold.”

Ivan looked around and noticed a hare under a bush.

“Well, but before running the race with me,” said he, “first go and try to outrun my youngest son.”

Speedy rushed to the hare, and the latter, frightened half to death by the devil, dashed through the bushes and in the twinkling of an eye was lost out of sight. Speedy couldn’t catch up with the hare, and so he went back to the chief devil. He got very angry and sent the third devil. His name was Whistler.

Whistler jumped out of the swamp and said to Ivan:

“The one who whistles loudest wins all the gold!”

“Well then,” said Ivan, “whistle!”

The devil whistled and so hard that the swamp shook and the leaves fell off.

Then came Ivan’s turn to whistle. He said:

“Now, Whistler, you’d better cover your eyes with a kerchief, for if I whistle real hard they’ll pop out of your head.”

The devil got frightened and covered his eyes with a kerchief.

“You may whistle,” he said.



Ivan picked up a good-sized piece of wood and struck the devil a violent blow right between his eyes.

It made the devil even shout with pain.

“Wait a moment!” said Ivan. “I’ve whistled softly. Let me repeat it once more, but a bit louder.”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed the devil. “I’ve had enough! Take all the gold, but don’t whistle again!”

So Ivan took the gold and went home.



OUHG AND THE GOLD SNUFF-BOX



There was once upon a time an orphan boy Yanka, the son of a forester. His mother and father were both dead, and he had no relatives whatsoever. So it came to pass that he lived alone in the forest in his parents' hut. To make life a bit more cheerful for himself, he took in a motley Cat to live with him.

The Cat grew attached to him. Wherever his master went, he went too.

One day Yanka went to gather some wood. The Cat, as usual, followed in his wake. Yanka gathered some twigs, tied them up and carried the bundle home while the Cat dragged one small dry twig after him.

Yanka grew tired, sat down on a stump and thought how hard it was for him to live in this world. He let out a heavy sigh and under his breath said:



“Oh! Oh!”

The words had scarcely escaped him, when an old man wearing a long beard, hopped out from under the stump.

“Tell me, young man, why you called me?”

Yanka took a look at the old man and said in a frightened voice:

“But I didn’t call you, grand-dad!”

“What do you mean you didn’t call me?” the old man said. “I am not hard of hearing! Twice you repeated my name, Ouhg, Ouhg... Now tell me your wish and it will be fulfilled!”

Yanka thought a moment and said:

“I have no wishes, but I am very hungry. If you have some bread to spare, could you give me a piece?”

Ouhg darted back under the stump and after a while brought out a piece of bread and a bowl of cabbage soup.

“Here you are!” he said. “Eat!”

The orphan boy Yanka ate his fill, fed his Cat, and bowed low to the old man:

“Many thanks, grand-dad, for the dinner. It’s a long time since I’ve had anything so delicious to eat.”

He threw the bundle of wood on his back and walked off to his hut, a happy lad.

A day passed, then another, and again he



felt hungry. Yanka recalled the old man. "I'll go to him once more and try my luck. Maybe he'll give me something to eat this time, too."

Yanka reached the place where he had seen the old man, sat on the stump and called his name: "Ouhg!"

The old man hopped out.

"Name your wish, young man!"

Yanka bowed low to him.

"I'm hungry, grand-dad. You couldn't give me a piece of bread, could you?"

In the twinkling of an eye the old man brought him a piece of bread and a bowl of cabbage soup.

And so it went on: whenever Yanka wants to eat, he goes to the old man.

But once, instead of the dinner, the old man brought out a gold snuff-box.

"Listen carefully, my son," he said. "Don't disturb me any more. I'm old already, and it's difficult for me to bring you your dinner. Take this snuff-box. If you need anything, open it, and my serving-man will immediately appear before you. He will grant you your every wish just as I have done."

Yanka took the gold snuff-box, thanked the old man heartily and ran off to his hut.

At home he opened the gold snuff-box. A little man jumped out of it, but he was not at all like



the old man Ouhg. He was a smart-looking, spry young fellow.

"Name your wish!" the little man said in a shrill voice.

"Something to eat, brother."

It the twinkling of an eye the little man put a bowl of cabbage soup and a large piece of rye bread on the table. As for himself, he darted back into the gold snuff-box and locked himself in.

Yanka continued to live in this way until there came the day when he felt he had to go out into the wide, wide world, to see people and to be seen, for he had never been anywhere beyond his forest.

He took his gold snuff-box, called to his Cat and left.

Many a village and many a city did he pass through; many were the things that he saw. And one fine day he come to the sea, a sea so blue. And lo and behold! there on the seashore he sees a tiny silver Fish. A wave must have cast her ashore at high tide and here she still is. The little Fish is all in a tremble, she beats against a stone, gasps for breath in the baking sun, but no matter how she tries, she cannot make her way back into the sea.

Yanka felt very sorry for the poor little



Fish. He took her up carefully and cast her back into the sea.

The little Fish flapped her tail, gulped in some water and came to. She raised her head out of the water and said, speaking in a human voice:

“Thank, you, kind fellow, for saving me from certain death. Perhaps there will come a day when I shall be able to help you.”

With these words she went — splash! — back into the water.

Yanka began to laugh:

“Whatever can I need your help for, little Fish, when here in my pocket I have a much better servant than you can ever be!” But the little Fish did not hear him.

He continued his trip. There ran out a little grey Mouse from a hole. His Cat pounced, seized her by the scruff of the neck and was about to eat her.

Yanka felt sorry for the little Mouse. He was the kind of person who has pity for everybody, because he never forgot how hard his own life had been. He picked up the Mouse, patted her gently, and put her in his pocket. Then he took out a crust of bread from his bundle and threw it to her.

“Eat!” he said. “You are hungry, aren’t you?”





The Mouse quieted down and began to nibble at the crust.

Yanka walked on along the seashore. Evening came on in the meantime — time to look for a place to spend the night in. And behold! High up on a mountain he sees a palace! “That’s not for me!” he thinks. “They won’t let me in there.” And he goes on walking. Suddenly he sees a little fisherman’s hut near the sea. Yanka enters the fisherman’s hut and asks whether he can spend the night there.

“Yes, of course you can,” says the master of the house. “You can stay here overnight. It’ll be all the merrier for me.”

They begin to talk. Yanka asks the master of the house:

“Whose palace did I pass by on the way?”

“That palace belongs to the King,” says the man. “The King himself lives there. Not long ago a great misfortune befell him: in the middle of the night a Dragon came flying in, seized his daughter and carried her off to his enchanted island. Neither by sea nor by land has anyone been able to reach it. The King is eating his heart out now. He has let it be known far and wide throughout the land that he will give his daughter in marriage to whosoever will return her to him, and upon his death that man will be heir to his entire kingdom.



Many princes and many dukes have come here from distant lands, and not one of them has been able to get to the island. The Dragon raises such huge waves that the struggle against them is a hopeless one."

Yanka thought of his wonderful serving-man in the gold snuff-box, and he said to the fisherman:

"Please go and tell the King that tomorrow at daybreak he shall see his daughter."

The fisherman went to tell the glad news to the King, and Yanka was invited to come to the palace. When the King saw Yanka, he shrugged his shoulders: „Can it be possible," he thought, "that such a common fellow can accomplish what so many princes and dukes have failed to do? Simply impossible!" But so anxious was he to see his daughter that he did not dare to lose this chance to try his luck once more. So he asked Yanka:

"Is it true, young man, that you wish to make an attempt to deliver my daughter from her prison?"

Yanka bowed to the King and answered:

"Yes, it is, Your Majesty! It is not a lie!"

"Well, but see to it," the King said, "that by daybreak tomorrow my daughter is back with me in my palace, otherwise I shall have you tortured to death on an iron rack!"

"Alright!" was Yanka's answer. "So be it!"



He left the palace and opened the gold snuff-box. The smart little man darted out and said: "Name your wish!"

"Do me a favour, brother! Have an iron bridge put up overnight, a bridge that will reach from the King's palace across to the enchanted island belonging to the Dragon, and have a gold coach and six waiting there. Tomorrow at daybreak I shall go to the island."

"Alright!" said the little man. "You shall have your wish!"

Yanka returned to the fisherman's hut and lay down to sleep. At daybreak he awoke and looked out. Lo and behold! an iron bridge, reaching from the King's palace across to the Dragon's enchanted island, and on the bridge a gold coach and six, and near the horses his young serving-man with a whip in his hand.

Yanka came up to his serving-man, took out the snuff-box, and said:

"Thank you, brother! Now you can go and rest. You must be tired."

The little man gave Yanka the whip, and himself darted into the gold snuff-box.

Yanka took his seat in the coach and set off to release the Princess. Arriving on the island, he saw an immense dark castle and the Princess looking out of her window in great astonishment. It



was such a long time since she had seen anybody at all, the sight of Yanka made her as happy as if it was her own father there.

"Who are you?" she questions him. "And why have you come here?"

"Don't ask questions, Your Highness," Yanka answers. "Quick! Into the coach! To your father's palace!"

These words made the Princess even happier.

"But I can't get out through the door! That cursed Dragon is sleeping there. During the night he flies about searching for prey, during the day he lies at the door taking his rest."

"Then climb out through the window!"

"Afraid to!"

Yanka stretched out his hands:

"Jump!"

The Princess jumped out of the window straight into his arms. Yanka caught her, seated her in the coach and flew with lightning speed to the King's palace.

Hearing a rumbling, the Dragon awoke, sprang up, looked around — the Princess was gone! Off he went after her so fast the bridge shook under him, his mouth spouted fire.

Yanka turned round, glanced back — the Dragon in a cloud of smoke was speeding after them. He was almost upon them. Yanka whipped



the horses on. They tore forward, laying themselves out. Yanka rushed ashore, took the Princess out of the coach, hid himself from her, opened the gold snuff-box and ordered his serving-man to remove the bridge.

In the twinkling of an eye the little man had the bridge removed, and the Dragon, exhausted, fell into the deep sea and was drowned.

In the meantime the King awoke, looked out of the window — he could hardly believe his eyes: his daughter was approaching the palace! And Yanka was leading her!

The King ran out to meet them, took his daughter into his arms and began kissing her. How happy he was, how glad!

“Well, young man,” the King said to Yanka, “you have made me very happy. I will therefore give you my daughter in marriage and upon my death you shall inherit my kingdom.”

The marriage feast was held, and the orphan boy Yanka became the husband of a Princess. Everybody loved him. The Princess alone looked askance at him. The idea that she was the wife of a common fellow was displeasing to her. And there came a day when she began nagging him:

“Tell me, who built you that bridge that you carried me across?”



Yanka did his best to put her off, but it was of no use.

"I shall die," his wife said, "if you don't tell me the truth."

What could he do? Yanka told his wife the truth, and he showed her the gold snuff-box.

"But," he said, "you must swear that you will never take it in your hands without my permission."

His wife swore to that, and then she said:

"I wish to live with you in the castle on the island. Tell your servant you wish to have a bridge erected."

Yanka did not begin to argue with her: he opened the snuff-box in the presence of his wife, gave the command to his servant, and lo and behold! there stood the bridge!

They moved into the Dragon's castle. Yanka's wife said:

"Don't have the bridge removed. We shall use it to visit my father in his palace, or to go wherever else we may wish."

They had been living in the castle for some time, when one day Yanka decided to go hunting. He took his bow and arrow, and to make the way more cheerful for himself, his Cat and little Mouse, and set off across the bridge.

Hardly had he crossed the bridge and got





ashore, than he saw the bridge behind him was gone! "A miracle, no less!" Yanka thought. Into his pocket went his hand — but the snuff-box was not there! The Cat he had taken, the Mouse he had taken, but the gold snuff-box he had forgotten...!

Now everything was clear to him. "That's the oath of a Princess!" Yanka thought to himself. "I took pity on her, rescued her from misery, and she repays me for my kindness with evil. I'll have to go back to my hut again, and go hungry as before."

He sat on the seashore and even began to weep, thinking of his wife's treachery. Suddenly he felt his Mouse scratching away in his pocket. She stuck out her head and said:

"Why are you weeping, my good man?"

Yanka told her about the misfortune that had befallen him.

"Never mind!" the Mouse comforted him. "We shall find a way out of your difficulty."

She whispered something to the Cat, then sat on his back, and they swam across the sea. They swam up to the castle. The Cat hid in the orchard while the little Mouse got into the Princess' bedroom through a crack in the wall.

She sat there a long time trying to spy out where the Princess was keeping the snuff-box.



And she did finally see where — in a little wooden casket!

At night when the Princess had fallen asleep, the little Mouse gnawed open the casket, snatched the gold snuff-box, and ran out to the Cat in the orchard.

“I’ve got it!” she said. “The gold snuff-box!”

“Quick! Onto my back!” the Cat ordered! “To swim back!”

With the Mouse on his back, the Cat, snorting, swam on the crest of the waves. They had almost reached the shore when the Cat said to the Mouse:

“You haven’t lost the snuff-box, have you?”

“Of course not!” said the Mouse. “Here it is!”

She held up the snuff-box to show it to the Cat, but could not hold on to it. Flop! went the snuff-box into the sea!

“Oh! You clumsy thing!” the Cat exclaimed. “What have you done?”

He swam ashore, seized the little Mouse, bit his teeth into her neck.

“I’ll choke you to death!”

Yanka saw that and he took the little Mouse away from the Cat. But when he learned what had happened, he again sat on the seashore, the unhap-



piest creature on earth — so terrible was the loss of the gold snuff-box for him!

Suddenly a little silver Fish appeared in the sea.

“Why, my man, so sad? Tell me! Perhaps I can help you in some way and thus repay you for having saved me from certain death.”

Screwing his eyes, Yanka looked hard at her and recognized his little Fish.

“Alas!” he sighed heavily. “Great is my loss!”

And he told the little Fish about the trouble he was in. The little Fish listened to his story and said cheerfully:

“Your trouble is no trouble at all! Here in the sea I have as many snuff-boxes as you can possibly wish for. I will throw them ashore one after another. When you recognize your snuff-box, you can take it, but the rest you will return to me, they are mine.”

The little Fish flapped her tail and dived back into the sea, to the very bottom.

Without wasting a single moment, she began throwing snuff-boxes ashore — silver ones, gold ones, diamond ones. The sight of those snuff-boxes made Yanka’s head go round and round. He began to examine each one in turn very carefully and finally did come across his own. Yanka



was so happy. He threw the rest of the snuff-boxes into the sea and shouted to his little Fish:

“Thank you, my dear little Fish! Thanks to you, my troubles are over!”

He took his gold snuff-box and started off together with his little Mouse and his Cat to search for better people.



THE WIDOW'S SON



One day a great misfortune befell the land. The nine-headed serpent, Thunder-Wonder, came flying out of nowhere and stole the sun and the moon from the sky. How bereaved the people were and how they bewailed their fate! How dark and cold it was without the sun!

In that part of the world there lived a poor widow and her five-year old son. They suffered from both hunger and cold. Life was very hard for the widow. Her only comfort was her son who was growing up a clever and daring fellow.

Nearby there lived a rich merchant. He had a son of the same age as the widow's, and the two boys became great friends. As soon as the merchant's son awoke, he would run over to the widow's hut, where the boys played by the light of a candle. Then they would run out to play in the



street or at the river, a habitual thing for little children to do.

One day the widow's son said to the merchant's son:

"Ah! If only I could have such good food as you get, I'd become so strong and powerful that I'd fight and conquer the monster Thunder-Wonder! I'd take the sun and the moon from him and hang them up again in the sky!"

The merchant's son came home and told his father what the widow's son had said.

"That's unbelievable!" said the merchant in astonishment. "Go and call him out into the street. With my own ears I want to hear him saying that."

Off went the merchant's son to his friend and called him out to play.

"I'm hungry," said the widow's son, "but not even a piece of bread in the house."

"Let's go out into the street and I'll bring you some bread."

The merchant's son went home, took a hunk of bread and brought it to his friend. The widow's son ate the bread and cheered up a bit.

"You remember what you said yesterday about Thunder-Wonder?" the merchant's son asked.

"Of course, I do."

And he repeated word for word what he had



said about Thunder-Wonder. The merchant standing round the corner heard everything with his own ears.

"Indeed, yes!" he thought. "This fellow is not an ordinary boy. I must take him into the house and see what'll happen."

The merchant took the widow's son into his household and began to give him the same food he himself ate. And the result? Most remarkable was the way in which the widow's son began to grow! In a year or two he became so strong and powerful that he could overcome even the merchant himself. At this time the merchant wrote to the Tsar:

"Your Majesty! This is how things stand: the widow's son is living in my house and he says when he grows up he'll conquer Thunder-Wonder and return the sun and the moon to the sky."

The Tsar read the letter and sent a reply:

"Make haste and bring the widow's son to my palace!"

The merchant harnessed a pair of horses, seated the widow's son in his carriage and brought him to the Tsar.

"What food must we give you to make you strong and powerful!" the Tsar inquired of him.

"Ox-liver, for three years!" answered the widow's son.



The Tsar, of course, had plenty of oxen. No need for him to go and buy any — he had but to order — and oxen were slaughtered to feed the widow's son all the liver he required.

Now that the widow's son had much better food than the merchant used to give him, he grew sturdy and tough.

He and the Tsarevich were of the same age and they played together in the Tsar's chambers.

Thus passed three years.

One day the widow's son said to the Tsar:

"Now I shall go in search of Thunder-Wonder. But your son and the merchant's son must accompany me. With my comrades at my side the way will be merrier."

"Good! So be it!" agreed the Tsar. "They shall accompany you. You can have anything you wish, but you must conquer the monster!"

He sent a letter to the merchant saying that his son should appear at the palace. The merchant had no wish to let his son go off on this long and distant journey, but there is no arguing with a Tsar!

The merchant's son arrived at the Tsar's palace. Then the widow's son said to the Tsarevich:

"Tell your father to have a mace forged for me weighing 200 lbs. Then I'll have something



with which to chase away at least dogs. You see, I'm afraid of dogs!"

"And for me," the merchant's son said, "a mace weighing no less than 100 lbs."

"And how about me?" said the Tsarevich. "Am I then worse than you? I'll need a mace too. Mine shall weigh some 70 lbs."

He went to his father and related everything to him. The Tsar ordered his blacksmiths to forge three maces, one for each boy: a 200 lb one for the widow's son, a 100 lb one for the merchant's son, and 70 lb one for his own son.

The widow's son took his mace, went out into open country and threw the mace up into the sky. It stayed there three hours or so and came flying back. The widow's son raised high his right hand, palm upward. The mace struck against his palm and broke in two...

The widow's son became angry and said to the Tsarevich:

"Go and tell your father not to deceive us. With such a mace we'll but die, all of us will. Have him order his blacksmiths to forge me a stronger mace and a bigger one, weighing some 500 lbs."

"And for me, one weighing some 250 lbs," said the merchant's son.

"And for me, one weighing some 100 lbs," said the Tsarevich.



He went to his father and told him what had to be done. The Tsar ordered his blacksmiths to appear before him.

“What the devil were you thinking of when you forged those maces? Why did you forge such a bad mace for the widow’s son?”

And he ordered three new maces to be forged, larger and better ones.

Bang-bang! Clang-clang! went the blacksmiths’ hammers. And the three new maces were ready!

The widow’s son took his mace, went out into open country and threw it up into the sky. The mace stayed there from morning till night, and then came flying back. The widow’s son raised his knee — the mace struck against it and broke into two halves.

This time the widow’s son himself went to the Tsar and took his friends along with him.

“If you wish me to conquer Thunder-Wonder and take away the sun and the moon from him, then order your coppersmiths to cast a mace for me weighing some 900 lbs, and tell them to make sure the mace will not break under any condition.”

“And one for me weighing over 300 lbs!” the merchant’s son said.

“And for me a mace of 200 lbs will do!” the Tsar’s son said.



The Tsar called his coppersmiths to appear before him and ordered them to cast three maces, but without cheating: one to weigh 900 lbs, one 300 lbs, one 200 lbs.

The widow's son took the copper mace in his hands — it was just what he needed, and he felt more cheerful. He went out into open country and threw the mace up into the sky. Up and up it soared until it was out of sight, lost behind the highest clouds. All day and all night the widow's son walked the fields and meadows awaiting the return of his mace. Finally, in the early morning, he heard a noise. It was the mace flying from behind the clouds.

The widow's son braced himself, his shoulder became tense — the mace struck against it and rolled down to the ground.

"This is what I can call a real mace!" he said. "With such a mace I can go anywhere and fight the treacherous Thunder-Wonder!"

The merchant's son and the Tsarevich were glad too. Their maces also pleased them. The coppersmiths had cast them well.

The widow's son said to his friends:

"Go and bid your fathers farewell. Time for us to be off on our way."

The Tsar's son went away, but the merchant's did not.





“Why waste time?” he said. “I took leave of my father when I left him to come here.”

The boys got together and set off on their journey.

They passed through one kingdom, a second kingdom and a third, and they came to a bridge made of thick logs. And nearby they saw a hut.

“Come!” said the widow’s son. “Let’s stay here overnight, and then have a rest for a day or two.

They entered the hut. And there they saw a little old woman at a spinning wheel. The boys greeted her and asked whether they could spend the night in her hut.

“We have come a long way, Grannie, and are very tired...”

“Of course you can spend the night here” said the old woman. “Who walks the highways doesn’t carry his house on his back.”

The widow’s son started talking with the old woman and he learned they had come to the kingdom of the dreadful serpent Thunder-Wonder. Just the place they were in search of!

Night was approaching and the widow’s son thought:

“Nobody should be able to make a surprise attack on us, it would be wise to station a sentinel over the bridge for the night.”



He sent the Tsarevich to stand sentinel there.

The Tsarevich came onto the bridge, walked up and down awhile. Then he reasoned: "Why should I stand here in view of anybody passing by on horseback or on foot? Better to go down under the bridge. I can lie down there." No sooner thought than done! How quiet and safe there!

In the meantime for the widow's son there was no sleeping.

"I must go and see," he thought, "whether the Tsarevich is standing guard."

At midnight he went to the bridge, looked all around, but found no sentinel!

While he was looking for the Tsarevich he saw the three-headed serpent, Thunder-Wonder, come a-hunting! On the head in the middle there sat a sharp-sighted falcon, and at his side ran his swift-footed hound. No sooner did his horse step on the bridge, than he began to neigh, the hound began to bark, and the falcon raised a clamour.

The youngest Thunder-Wonder struck his horse between the ears.

"You — you bag of grass! Why this neighing? And you! You dog-meat! Why barking? And you! You hawk's feather! Why such a clamour? If it's my enemy you scent, he can't be anywhere nearby. I have but one enemy, and he lives in a far-



off kingdom at the other end of the world. He is the widow's son. Not even the raven himself could have brought his bones here!"

"The raven hasn't brought this good fellow's bones here! He's come himself!"

The serpent was frightened.

"You — the widow's son! Here?!"

"Yes, here I am!"

"Well, what are you going to do? Fight? Or make peace?"

"I haven't travelled this far to make peace with you, but to fight you, you devil!"

"Then prepare the ground for threshing!" shouted the serpent.

The widow's son replied:

"You need it — you prepare it! You have three heads, you can breathe thrice, while I have only one head. So you blow! I'm not used to luxuries. I can fight even on damp earth!"

Thunder-Wonder dismounted, blew thrice, and the ground was smooth for three miles around.

They began to fight.

Three hours the fighting lasted. The widow's son knocked off Thunder-Wonder's three heads and vanquished him. The horse he set free on the green pastures, the hound and the falcon he let go into open country. As for himself, he returned to the hut and lay down to sleep.



In the morning the Tsarevich returned from his night watch.

"Well, did anything happen during the night?" the widow's son inquired. "Perhaps someone passed by either on foot or on horseback?"

"No. Nobody. During the whole night not even a bird flew by," the Tsarevich replied, "not even nearby."

"I can't depend on you, my comrade. That's clear," thought the widow's son. "Evidently I must depend more on myself."

The following night he sent the merchant's son to stand sentinel on the bridge. The merchant's son walked up and down the bridge and thought: "Why should I risk my head here? Better to go down under the bridge and sleep there."

And he did just that.

At midnight the widow's son went to the bridge to see whether his comrade was standing guard. He looked here and there. Nobody in sight! Suddenly he saw the six-headed Thunder-Wonder come riding onto the bridge. His horse reared and neighed loudly, his hound barked, the falcon raised a clamour. Thunder-Wonder struck his horse between the ears.

"You bag of grass! Why this neighing? And you! You dog-meat! Why barking? And you, hawk's feather! Why such a clamour? There is no



enemy nearby to equal me in strength. There is one, that's true, but he lives in a far-off kingdom at the other end of the world. He's the widow's son. But even the raven himself could not have brought his bones here."

The widow's son said:

"The raven has not brought this good fellow's bones here. He's come himself!"

"You — the widow's son? And here?"

"Yes, here I am! And to the devil with you!"

"So what are you going to do? Fight? Or make peace?"

"Not to make peace with you, you evil spirit, have I travelled thus far, but to fight you!"

"I'd advise you, widow's son, to make peace, otherwise I'll kill you!" shouted the serpent.

The widow's son replied:

"When you've killed me, then you'll talk!"

"Then prepare the ground for threshing!" shouted the serpent.

"You need it — you prepare it! You have six heads, I have but one! I can do without a threshing ground — I'm a poor peasant's son, not accustomed to luxuries. I can fight even on damp earth!"

Thunder-Wonder dismounted, his heads blew and the earth became a smooth threshing ground for six miles around.

They began to fight.



For six hours they fought. The widow's son knocked off each one of Thunder-Wonder's six heads. The horse he set free on the green pastures, the hound and the falcon he let go into open country. As for himself, he returned to the hut and lay down to sleep.

In the morning the sentinel returned, awakened the widow's son and said:

"It's impossible to sleep long in a strange place! As for me, I did not sleep a wink all night!"

"Nor is this comrade to be depended on," thought the widow's son. "I must depend on myself alone."

Night fell again. The widow's son sent the little old woman to sleep in the barn where she stored her crops. Then he stuck a knife into the wall, placed a beaker under it and said to his friends:

"If you see blood dripping from the knife into the beaker, you must run to my aid."

His friends should not fall asleep, he gave them a pack of cards and told them to play.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold than they threw down their cards and lay down to sleep.

The widow's son came to the bridge and took up his night watch. Exactly at 12 midnight the nine-headed Thunder-Wonder, the eldest one of the serpents, came riding onto the bridge. On his breast the moon was shining, on his middle head



the sun was blazing. The horse under him fell on his knee, began neighing loudly, the hound and the falcon raised a clamour.

Thunder-Wonder struck his horse between the ears.

“You — you bag of grass! Why are you neighing? And you! You dog-meat! Why barking? And you! You hawk’s feather! Why this clamour?”

The horse said:

“Ah! It’s the last time, master mine, that you have gone hunting, riding on me...”

“You, you meat for the wolves, that’s a lie! My enemy is not here. He lives in a far-off kingdom at the other end of the world. He is the widow’s son, but not even the raven could have brought his bones here!”

The widow’s son stepped forward and said:

“It’s not the raven who has brought this good fellow’s bones here. He’s come himself!”

“You — the widow’s son? And here?!”

“Yes, here I am!”

“Well then, what’s your wish? To fight or to make peace? My advice is to make peace, for you are too young yet to measure your strength against mine!”

“Too young or not, but in any case I haven’t come such a long distance to make peace with you, you evil thief, but to fight!”





“So be it, if you are so brave as to fight with me, but you must first make the ground ready for threshing. I’ll see what strength there is in you”.

“I don’t need a smooth threshing ground. I can fight even on damp earth! As for you, prepare it for yourself if you are accustomed to smooth ground.”

Thunder-Wonder dismounted, breathed hard — and the ground became smooth for nine miles around.

They began to fight.

They fought and fought — the widow’s son knocked off three of Thunder-Wonder’s heads, but he couldn’t conquer the serpent. “Where then are my comrades?” he thought. “Can they be sleeping?”

The widow’s son asked Thunder-Wonder for a respite:

“Even tsars and kings pause for a rest when they fight. Let’s do the same!”

“Let’s!” said Thunder-Wonder.

The widow’s son stepped aside, took off the mitten from his left hand and threw it with such strength at the hut where his friends were sleeping that the whole roof came down. But the friends only turned over on the other side and slept as before. The widow’s son saw he could not expect any help from them.



The fighting was resumed. On and on it continued. The widow's son knocked off three more of Thunder-Wonder's heads; he himself stood knee-deep in blood, but he could not knock off the remaining three heads.

Again he asked for a respite.

"What's the matter with you?" Thunder-Wonder smiled. "Asking for a respite so often!"

"Haven't we time enough, then?"

"Well, let's have a rest."

The widow's son chose a moment when the enemy was off guard, to throw his other mitten at the hut.

The hut was carried off to the very windows, but the friends kept on sleeping.

After a short rest the fighting began again. The widow's son was now almost up to his waist in blood but he could not overcome the remaining heads — he hadn't enough strength for that.

In the meantime it began to dawn. "My pals have probably had enough sleep by now," the widow's son thought. "It's necessary to remind them of me once more."

Again he said to Thunder-Wonder:

"Even when tsars and kings fight they pause for a rest. So let's rest once more. And then we'll fight on to the very end."

Thunder-Wonder also felt very weak.



“Agreed!” he said. “Let’s have a rest!”

The widow’s son took off the boot from his left foot and threw it at the hut. The boot struck the hut and the hut was carried off to its very cellar. The friends jumped out of their beds and saw the beaker filled to the top with blood that had dripped down from the knife.

“It’s clear,” they said, “our friend’s in deep trouble.”

They grabbed their maces and rushed out to the bridge.

Thunder-Wonder saw them and began to shake all over.

“Ah, widow’s son, now I see why you asked for a respite and took off your boot from your left foot! You’ve outwitted me!”

The three friends began to beat Thunder-Wonder so hard that he did not know whom to attack.

They knocked off the remaining three heads. And that was the end of Thunder-Wonder.

The widow’s son then took the sun and the moon and hung them up in the sky. And immediately there was light everywhere on earth. People ran out into the street, rejoicing, feasting their eyes, warming themselves in the sun.

The friends returned to the old woman, put up a new hut for her, a better one than she’d had befo-



re, and decided to rest a while before starting off on their way back.

The Tsarevich and the merchant's son sleep, then make merry, but there is no rest for the widow's son. His thoughts bother him: "Not one of the Thunder-Wonder monster-serpents is alive now, but their wives are, and they are witches. They can still cause great misfortune. How to prevent it?"

He left his friends, changed his clothes to disguise himself and went to the castle where the three Thunder-Wonder monsters had lived.

"You don't by any chance need a day-labourer?" he asked the witches.

"We do, we do!" the eldest replied. "We are widows now, there's no one to do the work here. Our husbands have all been killed by the widow's son. But we'll take revenge on him! We'll do away with him yet!"

"And how will you do that?" the man wanted to know. "He's very strong, to all appearances."

"He has strength, but we have witchcraft," the wife of the youngest Thunder-Wonder said. "When he is on his way back together with his friends who helped him, I'll become a spring that they'll come across. They will drink my water — and that will be the end of them."

"And if that doesn't kill them," the wife of



the six-headed Thunder-Wonder said, "then I'll become a sweet apple-tree. They'll each eat one of my apples — and they won't want any more..."

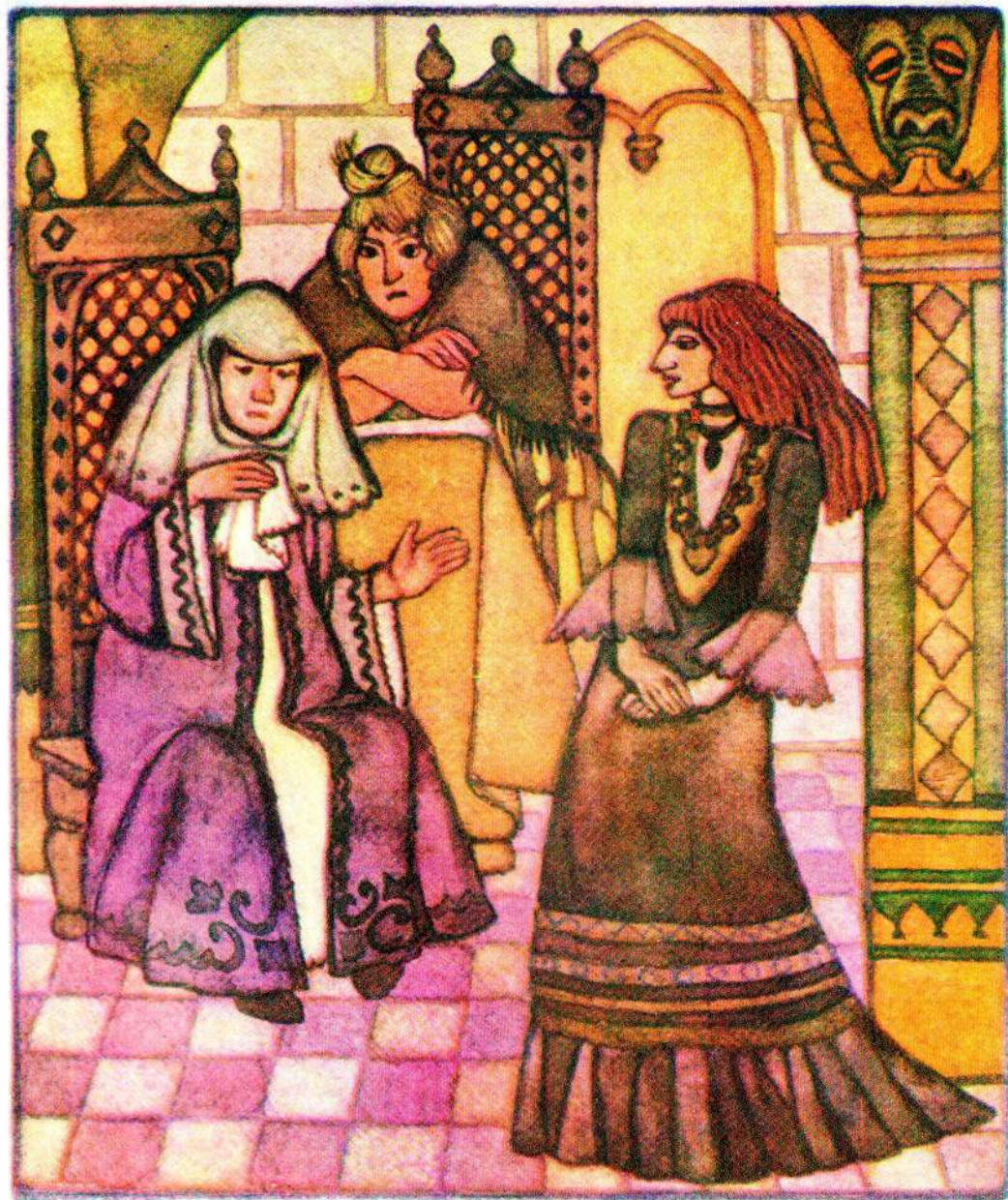
"They can do without water and without apples," said the wife of the eldest Thunder-Wonder, the nine-headed one. "I've thought of something even better: I'll become a flowering meadow covering a distance of sixty miles and I'll have a shady willow-tree growing on their way. They will come riding up to it, will set their horses free to graze in the pastures, and themselves will lie down to rest. But no sooner will they lie down, than they will die. They'll never get up again. And when the horses have nibbled at but three grasses in that meadow, they'll fall dead on the spot."

That was all the widow's son needed. He waited for nightfall when the witches would be fast asleep and he could leave the castle and rush off to his friends.

At daybreak the following day they went to the meadow where each one of them caught himself a horse. The widow's son mounted the horse that had belonged to the nine-headed Thunder-Wonder, the merchant's son mounted that of the six-headed one, and the Tsarevich that of the three-headed one. Off they rode to their own kingdom.

They galloped over fields and through forests until they reached a spring. The Tsarevich and





the merchant's son were so thirsty it was unbearable.

The widow's son said:

"After all, you are not peasants, so just wait a moment and I'll bring you some water."

He alighted, came up to the spring and began to beat it with his mace. He beat so hard that nothing but blood and dirt remained.

The friends almost wept. "Why have you done that? We shall die of thirst."

"This isn't a spring," the widow's son said. "It's a fraud to trick us!"

He mounted his horse, and they continued their journey.

They came riding up to an apple-tree. Oh! The apples that grew on it! Red and ripe and so tempting! Their mouths began to water.

The friends rushed to the apple-tree, but the widow's son halted them.

"Just a moment! After all, you are gentlefolk. I shall pick the apples for you."

He went over to the apple-tree, struck it with his mace... With one stroke it was felled, and it dried up at once.

"Why have you done that? We'd each have eaten an apple at least!"

"Not apples, those, but death for us," the widow's son said.



They moved on and came up to the flowering meadow where they noticed a shady willow-tree. How sleepy they became! And how the horses trampled the ground, beating with their hooves in their anxiety to get at the fresh grass.

The widow's son held the horses back.

"I'll go and see if the horses may graze in this meadow."

He went up to the willow and began to beat it so hard with his mace that the meadow dried up at once, and of the willow nothing but dry seeds remained.

"Now you can see what a willow this was and what a meadow," he said to his comrades.

They rode on across the dried-up meadow and stopped to spend the night in a green oak-grove. They let the horses graze there, had supper themselves and lay down to sleep. Three nights and three days they slept. And when they awoke the widow's son said to his friends:

"It's a stone's throw from here to our kingdom. Go to your homes by yourselves. Your fathers have long been awaiting you. But I have no father. I'll wander about the wide world yet a while."

The widow's son parted with his friends and rode off to roam about the world.

Whether he journeyed long or not, but in any case he arrived at the castle of Tsar Constance.



This Tsar was one-sided: had but half a head, one eye, half a beard, one arm, one leg. And he was extremely fond of horses.

When he saw the widow's son's horse, he said:

"Let's run a race around the castle. If I outstrip you, I'll take your horse away from you, but if you outstrip me, I'll give you my kingdom?"

"It's impossible," thought the widow's son, "that this one-sided and one-legged Tsar should outrun me." And he agreed.

The race began. Before the widow's son had taken three steps, the one-legged Tsar had run thrice round the castle.

The Tsar took away the horse from the widow's son and put him in his stable.

The widow's son could hardly keep from bursting into bitter tears.

How he regretted the loss of his horse! He began to beg the Tsar.

"I'll do anything you wish, but return my horse to me!"

Tsar Constance, after thinking awhile, said:

"In a distant kingdom at the end of the world there lives Baba Karghota. She has twelve daughters, all alike, their hair, voices, faces all alike. Her house is surrounded by a high staked fence and on the top of each stake but one a human head is stuck. They are the heads of those who



had come to seek her daughters' hands in marriage. This is what I propose: if you can make Baba Karghota agree to a match between myself and her youngest daughter, I'll return your horse to you."

The widow's son thought awhile: "If I don't agree, I won't ever see my horse again. If I do agree I may lose my head, but perhaps I can keep my head and have my horse."

"So be it, I agree," he said to the Tsar, "I'm off to arrange the match."

He walks and walks, and lo and behold! a man is running across the sea as if he were on a bridge. The widow's son stares in amazement at the runner.

"Greetings, friend Swift-Sea-Runner!"

"Greetings to you, widow's son! Where are you going? And to whom?"

"I'm going to Baba Karghota to arrange a match between her youngest daughter and Tsar Constance."

"Take me along with you! I may prove useful to you."

"Come along then!"

Now there are two of them walking together. They see a man with a very long moustache. On one end of his moustache he is carrying a mill, with the other end he is propping up a cloud in the sky.

"Greetings, friend Moustachio!"



“Greetings to you, widow’s son! Where are you going? And to whom?”

“I’m going to Baba Karghota to arrange a match between her youngest daughter and Tsar Constance.”

“Take me along with you. You may need me.”

“Come along then.”

Now there are three of them walking together.

They walk and walk, and lo and behold! a man is drinking water from a lake. He drinks, and he drinks the lake dry, but still he cries: “I’m dying of thirst!”

“Greetings, friend Thirst!”

“Greetings to you, widow’s son! Where to and to whom!”

“I’m going to Baba Karghota to arrange a match between her youngest daughter and Tsar Constance.”

“Take me along with you!”

“Come along!”

They walk on a little, and lo and behold! a man is nibbling away at an aspen log, shouting all the time: “I’m hungry!”

“Greetings, friend Glutton!”

“Greetings to you, widow’s son! Where to and to whom?”

“I’m going to Baba Karghota to arrange a



match between her youngest daughter and Tsar Constance."

"Take me along with you!"

"Come along!"

They come to a forest where they meet a man in a sheepskin coat reaching down to his very feet. He is standing in the roadway clapping his hands in long gauntlets. He has but to clap and at once the trees are covered with hoarfrost.

"Greetings, friend Frost!"

"Greetings to you, widow's son! Where are you going?"

"To Baba Karghota to arrange a match between her youngest daughter and Tsar Constance."

"Without me you won't come to an agreement with Baba Karghota."

"Then you, too, come along with us!"

Now there are six of them walking together. They walk and they walk and they come up to Baba Karghota's courtyard. They see a head stuck onto the tops of all the stakes but one.

The widow's son says:

"My head will be stuck on that stake!"

"If not for us, perhaps yes!" answer his friends.

They look for a gate. No gate anywhere. Swift-Sea-Runner runs three times round the courtyard and finds the gate. They enter the courtyard.

On the porch Baba Karghota is standing, lost





in amazement. How could these travellers have discovered her gate?

The widow's son comes up to her.

"Greetings, hostess!"

"Greetings, widow's son! What has brought you here?"

"I've come to arrange a match between your youngest daughter and Tsar Constance."

"Well, if you are not jesting, you can try to arrange this marriage. But first you must drink up all the beer stored in my cellar. If you do that, I'll give my daughter in marriage to Tsar Constance, if you don't, you must lose your head."

"Gladly will I drink it all up!" the widow's son says. "I've come a long way and I'm dying of thirst. My friends' mouths are dry too."

Baba Karghota orders her servants to show the widow's son and his friends the way to the beer cellar. Her servants take them there and lock them in.

The widow's son and his friends drink their beer from glasses, but Thirst swallows whole barrels full of beer at one gulp! He finishes a barrel, strikes it with his fist and the barrel is smashed to pieces. He drinks all the barrels dry and shouts at the top of his voice:

"Baba Karghota, some more beer!"

Baba Karghota opens the cellar and sees all



the barrels smashed to pieces, and no more beer anywhere!

“There’s no beer left!” she says. “But I have pies. If you eat all the pies, you can arrange the marriage between my daughter and the Tsar.”

The matchmakers are all very glad.

“Come on, out with your pies! After our travels we’re awfully hungry.”

Baba Karghota orders another cellar to be opened — the one where the pies are stored — and she lets the matchmakers enter. As for the pies, there are heaps and heaps of them there.

While the others eat one pie, Glutton eats all the pies in the cellar, eats the walls, too, and shouts at the top of his voice:

“Baba Karghota, give me more and more pies!”

Baba Karghota became very angry. She and her daughters had been baking those pies three years — the matchmakers had eaten them all in one hour!

She orders her servants to heat the iron bathhouse. The servants heat it until its iron walls become red-hot. Then she says to the matchmakers:

“Wash yourselves in this bathhouse, stay here overnight, and in the morning we’ll discuss business matters.”

“Fine! We’ve travelled over many roads and



are dusty through and through. A wash will do us no harm."

Baba Karghota leads the matchmakers to the bathhouse. When the widow's son comes up to the threshold, Frost grabs him by the shoulder and pushes him back behind himself. He enters first, puts on his gauntlets, claps his hands, and in the twinkling of an eye the air is cool. The rest of the matchmakers enter after Frost. The old woman closes the door behind them and locks it...

Frost walks about the bathhouse, waving his gauntlets.

"Well, how is it? Not too cold?

"Neither too hot nor too cold, just right," his comrades praise it.

In the morning Baba Karghota sent her servants to the bathhouse.

"Go there and throw the roasted matchmakers to the dogs!"

The servants opened the bathhouse and found the six valiant fellows, alive.

Baba Karghota stood stupefied: she was helpless against the matchmakers.

"If you can tell me which is my youngest daughter," she said to the widow's son, "then you can arrange her marriage with Tsar Constance. If you cannot, your head will be stuck onto the stake."



The widow's son became very sad. "How am I to recognize her, this youngest daughter?" he wondered.

"I'll recognize her," Swift-Sea-Runner whispered in his ear. "I saw her daughters many a time when they came to bathe in the sea."

"All right!" the widow's son said to Baba Karghota. "Call your daughters!"

Soon Baba Karghota returned with her twelve daughters — their faces, their hair, their voices, their shoulders — all alike. She came forward, but the daughters she left standing where they were.

Thrice the widow's son went round, inspecting her daughters, but which was the youngest he could not say for sure: they were all alike.

At this moment Swift-Sea-Runner winked, his eyes pointing at the youngest daughter. The widow's son took her by the hand, led her forward to Baba Karghota.

"Here she is! Your youngest daughter!"

Baba Karghota became furious and began to tremble, but what could she do? Her craftiness had failed her.

The widow's son took Baba Karghota's daughter by the hand and led her outside the gate. No sooner did they come out, than she jumped up into the sky, sat on a cloud and laughed!



Moustachio lifted one end of his moustache upwards, hooked her with it and took her off the cloud.

Baba Karghota's daughter realized that this matchmaker was not to be trifled with and she no longer tried to trick him.

The matchmakers left for home.

On the way back each one of them stopped off at the place where he had first met with the widow's son and remained there. Swift-Sea-Runner took up his work again, Moustachio — his, Thirst — his... But the widow's son and Baba Karghota's daughter went on to Tsar Constance.

The Tsar had in the meantime used the widow's son's horse to carry tar to a pit he had prepared beforehand. He filled the pit with boiling tar. How the tar boiled! Then he put a reed across the pit.

The widow's son came up to him and said:

"Here she is, Tsar Constance! Baba Karghota's youngest daughter! How hard it was to get her for you! Now give me back my horse!"

The Tsar pointed to the reed and said, laughing into his one-sided beard:

"Cross this little bridge and I'll return your horse to you."

The widow's son looked at the reed — how frightened he became!



But Baba Karghota's daughter nudged him: "Don't be afraid," she whispered.

And nobody noticed how she thrust a strong steel rod through the reed.

"Go ahead and step on it!" she said to the widow's son.

He stepped on the reed, crossed it and said to the Tsar:

"See here, Tsar Constance, I've fulfilled both your requests. Now you fulfil at least one request of mine: cross this little bridge that you yourself have laid."

"And why not?" Baba Karghota's daughter urged him. "Cross it, or else you won't be my husband."

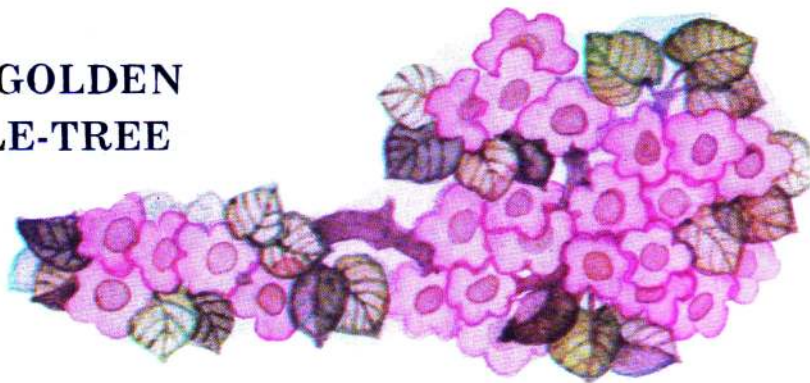
The Tsar thought he had nothing to fear. Hadn't the widow's son just crossed it?

But no sooner did he put his foot on the reed, than Baba Karghota's daughter — TUGGED! — and she pulled out the steel rod from it. The reed broke, the Tsar fell into the boiling tar and there he remained.

"And that's that!" said the widow's son. "Who sets a trap for others may fall into it himself!"

He married Baba Karghota's daughter. There was much rejoicing and feasting at the wedding. And there he is still living in that kingdom at the end of the world, ever increasing his riches.

THE GOLDEN APPLE-TREE



Once there lived an old man and an old woman. They had two daughters, step-sisters. The old man's daughter was called Galya, and the old woman's — Yulia.

Her own daughter the old woman petted and spoiled, but her step-daughter she beat till she was black and blue, and all the time with but one thought in her mind: to bring an end to that girl.

One day the old man went to the market and bought a bull-calf. He led him home, and then said to his daughters:

“You'll in turn, one the first day, the other the next, take this bull-calf to graze in the meadow.”

The first day his own daughter went to drive the bull-calf to the pasture. The wicked step-mother gave her a spindle and some hemp tow.

“See here,” she said, “make sure that you spin all the tow into yarn, and weave it into linen, and



bleach it, and bring it home by evening. If you don't get it done, your life will not be worth living!"

Galya led the bull-calf from the barn and slowly drove him to the meadow. As she followed him her eyes filled with bitter tears.

The little bull-calf asked her:

"Maiden fair, with light brown hair, why is it you are weeping?"

"How can I help weeping, dear little bull? My step-mother has ordered me to spin all this tow into yarn, to weave the yarn into linen, to bleach the linen and bring it home by evening."

"Don't cry!" answered the bull-calf. "Drive me where the silken grass waves, all fresh with dew, and there we shall think something up."

Galya drove the bull-calf to the waving silken grass, all fresh with dew. The little bull ate and ate, till he could eat no more, and then he said:

"Now put the spindle with the tow in my right ear, and breathe into my left ear."

Galya put the spindle with the tow in his right ear, breathed into his left ear, and looked. And there the tow was spun into yarn, the yarn was woven into linen, the linen was bleached, and it fell out in a heap...

When it was all done, Galya gathered up the white linen, and gaily drove the bull-calf home.



The wicked step-mother was waiting for her at the gate.

“Well, did you spin all the tow?” she demanded.

“I did, all of it,” answered Galya, and gave her the white linen.

The old step-mother did not believe her eyes, she could only wonder... How had her step-daughter done all that work in one day? Just then the neighbours came up, and were astounded. What fine linen Galya had woven!

The next day it was the turn of the old woman's daughter to drive the bull-calf to the meadow. Her mother gave her half a measure of tow, and said:

“Spin this tow, darling, and weave some linen finer even than your step-sister did. I want people to praise you, and not her!”

Yulia took a thick stick and drove out the bull-calf. She followed him, beating on his back all the time with the stick. She drove the bull-calf onto the bare common, threw down the tow, and lay down to sleep. The bull-calf trod the tow in the mud, and tangled it all up into knots.

Towards evening Yulia awoke, looked around, and saw the tow all trodden in the mud. She seized the stick, and how she began to beat the little bull. He ran off home, and she chased after him, screaming.



At home her mother asked her:

"How about your task? Done?"

"Well, no," said the daughter.

"And why not?" asked her mother.

"The bullock's to blame. Because of him I lost the spindle, and he trod the tow in the mud..."

The old woman got into a rage. Off she went to the old man, and said:

"Old man, you must kill that bull-calf!"

"And why should we slaughter him, eh?" the old man said in surprise.

"If you don't kill that bull-calf, then I'll drive you out of the house straightaway, as well as that daughter of yours!"

What could the old man do but agree? He promised to slaughter the bull-calf.

When Galya heard this, she ran to the bull-calf in the barn, put her arms around his neck, and began weeping bitterly.

"Maiden fair, with light brown hair, why is it you are weeping?"

Galya told him what the wicked step-mother had in mind.

"Don't cry! Dry your eyes, dear girl," said the bull-calf. "Listen carefully to me. When they slaughter me, take my liver, and in it you'll find a golden seed. Sow that seed in the garden, near the house. That's all. Farewell!"





Galya did as the bull-calf told her.

From that tiny seed there grew an apple-tree, with golden apples on it.

No matter who came riding or walking past that little garden, he was sure to stop off and stare in amazement at the golden apple-tree.

Once there came a handsome young Hussar from the war. He saw the apple-tree, and halted his horse. He reached out his hand, as if to pluck a golden apple. But the apple-tree went “Ding-ding-ding!” and raised its branches high. The Hussar took his hand away, and the branches returned to their place.

Galya saw all this through the window, and said to her step-mother:

“I’ll go and pluck an apple for that Hussar.”

But her step-mother stamped her foot at her, and screamed:

“I’ll knock your silly head off, if you do!”

She grabbed hold of Galya, and put her under the washtub, and sent Yulia into the garden. She thought to herself: “Let her go, it’s better that my own daughter should pick an apple for the Hussar — maybe he will fall in love with her...”

Yulia went up to the apple-tree, but the tree went “Ding-ding-ding!”, and raised its branches.

Yulia became very angry with the tree, and began to scold, swearing at it.



Then, all of a sudden, a cock flew up onto the courtyard fence, and began to crow:

“Cock-a-doodle-do-o-o! The old man’s daughter is hidden under the washtub, but the old woman’s daughter wants to pluck her step-sister’s apples and marry the gentleman...”

When the Hussar heard that, he jumped down off his horse and went into the house. There he found the old man’s daughter under the washtub. No sooner did he see her than he fell in love with her. She was so beautiful!

“Fair maiden!” then said the Hussar. “Pick me a golden apple from your tree.

Galya went to the apple-tree, and the apples fell down at her feet. She gathered them up in her apron, and brought them to the Hussar. The handsome Hussar lifted her up, and seated her on his steed, and carried her off home to his parents.

There they celebrated their wedding. And what a merry wedding-party it was! They began to live together, and what a happily married pair they were! A son was born to them, such a handsome little fellow! His father and mother could not take their eyes off him.

All this while the wicked step-mother could not sleep nights for envy of her step-daughter. Why had that Hussar married Galya and not her Yulia? And envy got the better of her.



One day she said to her daughter:

“Go, my dear, and visit your step-sister, call her to go bathing with you in the river, and drown her...”

Yulia did as her mother told her. She went on a visit to her step-sister. There she persuaded her to go bathing. At the river Yulia said to her:

“Sit here, sister, on the rock, and I’ll wash your back for you.”

Galya sat on the rock, and Yulia pushed her into the water under the rock, and herself ran back home.

At home they are waiting for Galya to come back, but in vain. Her little son is crying, but nobody can comfort him. His nurse takes him in her arms and walks along the river bank, looking everywhere and calling:

“Galya, dear Galya, your baby’s crying, he wants to be fed. The hens are asleep, the geese are asleep, all are asleep, all but your baby.”

And she hears a voice coming from the water:

“Ah, it’s hard for me to come out to my son. The stone presses on my legs, the water blinds my eyes...”

The little boy hears his mother’s voice, and cries even louder.

“Ah, I shall come, ah, I shall run!” his mother replies. “I can’t bear your cries! Oh! Baby mine!”



So his mother came up out of the water and fed her son, and he fell asleep. Then she went back into the water. The nurse returned home, and told what had happened at the river.

The next morning the father himself took a golden apple and his son, and went to the river. When he reached the bank, he called:

“Galya, Galya, my darling, your baby is crying, he’s hungry. The hens are asleep, the geese are asleep, all are asleep, all but your baby. He’s waiting for Mummy to feed him and put him to sleep.”

The baby started crying, the mother heard her son’s voice and replied:

“Ah, I shall come, ah, I shall run. I can’t bear to hear you crying, my dear little lad!”

So she came up onto the bank, fed her little son, and he fell asleep at once. Then her husband took the golden apple from his pocket, and gave it to his wife. No sooner did she take a bite of the golden apple, than she was her own self again.

How happy her husband was! He led her back home, and they began to live in happiness.

But they never ever again let the wicked step-mother, or her sly daughter cross their threshold.

HORN, QUICK! DO THE TRICK!



There lived an old man and an old woman. Very poor they were, as poor as a church mouse. They could not work and earn a living for themselves. They lived by begging.

Thus it went on till spring came and people started sowing. Then the old woman said to her husband:

“I wish you would sow some millet. I’ve kept a little for seed. Then we’d have millet kasha instead of the rusks we get from begging — they are too hard for our teeth.”

“All right,” the old man said, “I’ll do that.”

He dug up a small plot of land near the bushes and sowed it with millet.

The millet came up and ripened. The sun warmed it and the showers watered it. The old man never tired of looking at his fine crop.

Now one day when he came to the plot what



did he see but a crane taking a walk upon his millet.

“Shoo! Away with you!” the old man shouted at the crane. “Just think! What place have you chosen for your walk?”

The crane spread his wings and flew away.

The old man looked his plot over sorrowfully: all his crop was trampled down, crushed under the crane’s feet.

The old man was sorely troubled. He came home and said to his wife:

“A good crop was coming up, but we’re out of luck. A crane has made it a habit of his to take his walks on our plot. He has trampled everything down with his long legs. There’ll be no harvest to gather.”

The old woman was close to tears and she said:

“You used to be a good shot once. And your shot-gun lies somewhere in the loft. Take it and go shoot that rascally crane. Then we’ll have some meat instead of kasha.”

The old man thought that a good idea. He climbed up into the loft, found his shot-gun, wiped off the dust, loaded it with small shot and set out for his plot.

As he came there he saw the crane again trampling the millet.

Greatly angered, the old man levelled his gun



at the villain and was about to pull the trigger.

But the bird looked up and spoke up in a human voice:

“Wait, Old Man! What are you going to do?”

“Shoot you dead, that’s what!” the old man replied. “Those long legs of yours have trampled down all my millet.”

“I had no inkling this was your millet,” the crane said. “I thought it was the landowner’s. Do forgive me.”

“Easy to say ‘Forgive me!’” the old man said. “This millet plot was my last hope. And now because of you my old woman and I will have to starve to death.”

The crane attended to what the old man was saying.

“Well, if you are as poor as that,” he said, “just wait a moment. I have something for you to make up for the millet plot.”

He flapped his wings and flew away beyond the bushes.

The old man stood, shot-gun in hand, waiting.

“It looks as if the crane has taken me in. I wish I had shot him dead. What am I going to tell my old woman now?”

Scarcely did this thought cross his mind when lo and behold! the crane was flying out from behind the bushes, holding a small sack in his beak.



He alighted and held out the sack to the old man.

“Here you are,” he said. “This will repay you for the ruined millet.”

The old man cast a sidelong look at the present — it was an ordinary sack made of hemp. He shook his head and said:

“But, brother, what do I need another sack for? I have a lot of sacks of my own. I’m a beggar. As you know, sacks for a beggar are his only belongings.”

“Do take it, Old Man. Surely, you haven’t got a single sack like this one... This is a magic sack. You just place it in front of you and say: ‘O, sack, get undone for fun, in a wink give food and drink’ and in a jiffy a fine meal will appear. When you’ve eaten your fill you say: ‘O,sack, fold back, food and drink remove to the sack!’ And the sack will at once change into its proper shape.”

“Then thank you,” the old man said as he took the sack and set off homewards. He was impatient to find out whether the crane had told him the truth about the sack being a magic one. He sat down by the road, laid the sack on the ground and said:

“O, sack, get undone for fun, in a wink give food and drink.”

And lo! before the old man there appeared such



a rich spread as is seldom seen even in a landowner's house: pies and cottage loaves, boiled and roasted meat, a bowl of ham and all sorts of wines...

The old man was overjoyed.

"Good crane!" he cried. "He didn't take me in, after all."

He ate and drank his fill, then told his sack to fold back, put it in his bosom and joyfully went on his way.

He came home and hailed his wife:

"How're things, dear heart? How are you?"

"I'm all right! But how about you? Where have you been so long? I feared wolves had gobbled you up or bears hugged you to death, then dragged into the moss and covered with twigs and branches."

"No, Mother, wolves didn't gobble me up, bears didn't hug me to death. Here I am and a meal I bring fit for a king! So sit down to table, will you?"

The old man took the sack from his bosom, laid it on the table and said the magic words.

The old woman sat staring at the table wide-eyed: it was groaning with food heaped high upon it. And the little hut seemed to take on a brighter look...

"My! Where does all this come from?"

"From that crane you told me to shoot dead."



“Oh, my!” the old woman cried out. “To have killed such a fine crane!”

The old woman ate and drank her fill and then an idea struck her.

“Let us ask some people to come and visit us.”

“Which people?”

“Those who have nothing to eat.”

“All right,” the old man agreed.

The old woman went about the village and invited all the poor people to their house.

All of them had a square meal and, certainly, wondered at the magic sack. After that they would visit the old man and woman every day.

The news about the magic sack came to the ears of the steward who told it to the landowner.

The landowner flew into a temper.

“It can’t be that a mere beggar should have better things to eat and drink than I,” he said.

He harnessed his horses and drove to the old man’s hut.

“Have you really got a magic sack that can provide meals?” he asked.

The old man was loath to lie, so he told the truth.

“But you must show it to me.”

The old man laid the sack on the table and said the magic words.

The landowner was struck with wonder as he



saw the food and drinks that had appeared on the table. His own cooks could not have prepared such delicious things!

He began nagging the old man.

“Let me have that sack! What do you need such dainties for? Princes and landowners visit me and I have to prepare banquets for them.”

“No,” the old man replied, “I can’t give it to you. Who will provide food for my wife and me then?”

“I shall send you a whole cartload of plain food: bread, potatoes, salted pork fat...” He pressed and pressed the old man to give him the sack. Indeed, there was no shaking him off.

“If you don’t give it to me of your own free will, I’ll take it away by force,” the landowner threatened, “and you’ll get a lashing into the bargain.”

It is no use arguing with landowners. The old man gave him the magic sack.

The landowner returned to his estate. His house was always full of guests. He lived happily and there was feasting in his house every day. The sack served him well.

And not for a moment did he remember the old man and his wife.

The old man waited and waited, but the landowner never fulfilled his promise.



“Perhaps he has forgotten all about it,” the old woman said, “go and remind him.”

The old man betook himself to the landowner, but it was of no use! The man would not even talk to him.

“I haven’t got any bread to give you,” he said, “go and do your begging.”

“Well, give me back my sack, then,” the old man demanded.

“You halfwit!” the landowner cried. “You want your sack back! Hi, my men, give this beggar twenty-five lashes and throw him out. He must never show his face here again!”

The servants seized the old man, gave him a sound thrashing and threw him out.

By and by the old man came to and went home. There he told his wife how the landowner had paid him. The old woman was sorely grieved, she cursed the landowner and then said to her husband:

“Go and look for that good crane again. He might give you another sack like the first one.”

The old man got ready and went to the field. He sat down amid the millet and waited.

By and by he saw the crane come flying over. The old man said to the crane:

“I say, brother Crane, the landowner took your magic sack away from me. And his servants gave me a lashing into the bargain. How shall my old



wife and I live now? Couldn't you give me another sack like the first one?"

The crane thought a little and said:

"No, I won't give you another sack. I'll give you a horn instead."

He flew away behind the bushes and came back with a silver horn in his beak.

"Here's something for you to make up for the sack."

The old man looked bewildered.

"What on earth shall I do with it?" he inquired.

"Take the horn along with you when you go to the landowner and say: 'Horn, quick! Do the trick!' And after you have gratified the landowner, you say: 'Oh, all back into the horn!'"

With these words the crane flapped his wings and flew away.

The old man turned the silver horn in his hands this way and that.

"Indeed! This new gift of the crane is quite a puzzle! I fear I'll get another beating because of this horn..."

As the old man walked home he could not get the horn off his mind. And he wondered if he should take it to the landowner or not. Suddenly he saw the steward again.

"Where have you been to, old man?" the steward asked.





“I’ve been to see a friend of mine, the crane.”

“What has he given you?”

“A silver horn.”

“Show it to me.”

The old man took out the horn from his pocket and showed it to the steward..

“And can it be of any use?” the steward asked with interest.

“Well, no, it’s of no use,” the old man replied.

“How’s that, of no use? You must be keeping something from me. Perhaps it can rain gold.”

“Perhaps it can... Who knows?”

“Well then, order it to rain gold,” the steward insisted.

“Sir, you can do the ordering yourself.”

“How?”

“Just say: ‘Horn, quick! Do the trick!’ ”

The greedy steward echoed him at once: “Horn, quick! Do the trick!”

Immediately twelve bonny lads with lashes in their hands hopped out of the horn and set to work: they started giving the steward a good thrashing.

The man wailed and begged:

“Stop them, Old Man! They’ll beat me to death...”

The old man all but split his sides laughing.

“Don’t be so meddling and greedy,” he said.



“Don’t go about prying on millet plots that don’t belong to you.”

The twelve bonny lads thrashed the steward to within an inch of his life.

At last the old man said:

“Oh, all back into the horn!”

And in a twinkling all the bonny lads crept into the horn.

“Now I see why the good crane gave me this horn,” the old man said, smiling to himself as he set out for the landowner’s estate.

There he saw that the rich man’s house was full of guests. All were drinking and making merry. The old man’s magic sack lay on the table.

“What do you want, Old Man?” the landowner said.

“Please, sir, I’ve come to get my own sack back...”

The landowner’s sides shook with laughter.

“Ha-ha-ha! Here’s an old goose for you! You want another thrashing, don’t you? Hi, men, give him twenty-five lashes right here for my guests to see.”

The servants seized the old man and threw him on the bench. At that moment the old man took the silver horn out of his pocket and said:

“Horn, quick! Do the trick!”

Out hopped the twelve bonny lads and what



a lashing they gave the landowner, his servants and his guests! The landowner got the hardest beating of all as the old man stood by and commanded:

“Come, lads, give the servants one good lashing, two — to the guests and three to the landowner.”

The twelve bonny lads did the bidding with zest.

The landowner wailed and wailed until he could stand it no longer.

“Take back your sack, Old Man,” he said, “only call back your lads.”

“Now you are talking!” the old man said grinning. “But now the sack will not be enough to pay me off.”

“What else do you want? A horse, a cow...?”

“No, sir, that won’t be enough, either.”

“Oh-oh-oh...” the landowner wailed, “quickly say what else you wish before your lads lash me to death.”

“If you want to live, give your estate to the poor people as a gift. As for you, off with you!”

“Oh-oh, how can I live if I have no estate? Who will work for me, who will keep me in food?”

“Well, if you refuse, it’s your own look-out,” the old man said. “Hi, lads, give the mister a good thrashing.”



The bonny lads left off beating the guests and the servants and fell upon the landowner.

The rich man twisted and writhed under the lashes like an eel on a hot frying pan, until he could stand it no longer and cried:

“Be it as you wish — I will give my estate away!”

“Well, that’s better. But don’t you try any monkey tricks, for I have a good remedy for you,” the old man said, laughing. “Oh, all back into the horn!”

In the twinkling of an eye the twelve bonny lads crept into the horn.

The old man put the horn in his pocket and said:

“Tomorrow I’ll come and see: if you haven’t cleared out I’ll let loose my bonny lads again.”

And the old man left, now without a care in the world, his sack and horn on his back.

The very next morning the landowner left the estate before dawn: he feared the old man would return with his bonny lads.

THE MUSICIAN AND HIS MAGIC



There lived once upon a time a musician who began to play when he was quite a little boy yet. While tending the oxen he would cut off a reed, make himself a pipe and begin to play on it. So wonderful was his playing that the oxen stopped nibbling the grass and pricked up their ears to listen. The birds in the forest stopped their chirping, the frogs in the swamps stopped their croaking.

When he is on a night watch, it's merry there. The young fellows and their girls sing, joke, have a good time in the way of young folk everywhere in the world. The night is warm, the weather sultry. Everything so beautiful!

Our musician begins to play on his pipe. In an instant the boys and girls, as if by command, grow silent. A wonderful feeling of delight seems to fill their hearts, some unknown force takes



hold of them and lifts each one of them up higher and higher into the clear, blue sky, up to the stars so bright.

The shepherds on the night watch sit motionless. Forgotten the pain in their hands and feet, so tired after a hard day's labour, and the hunger gnawing at their stomachs is also forgotten.

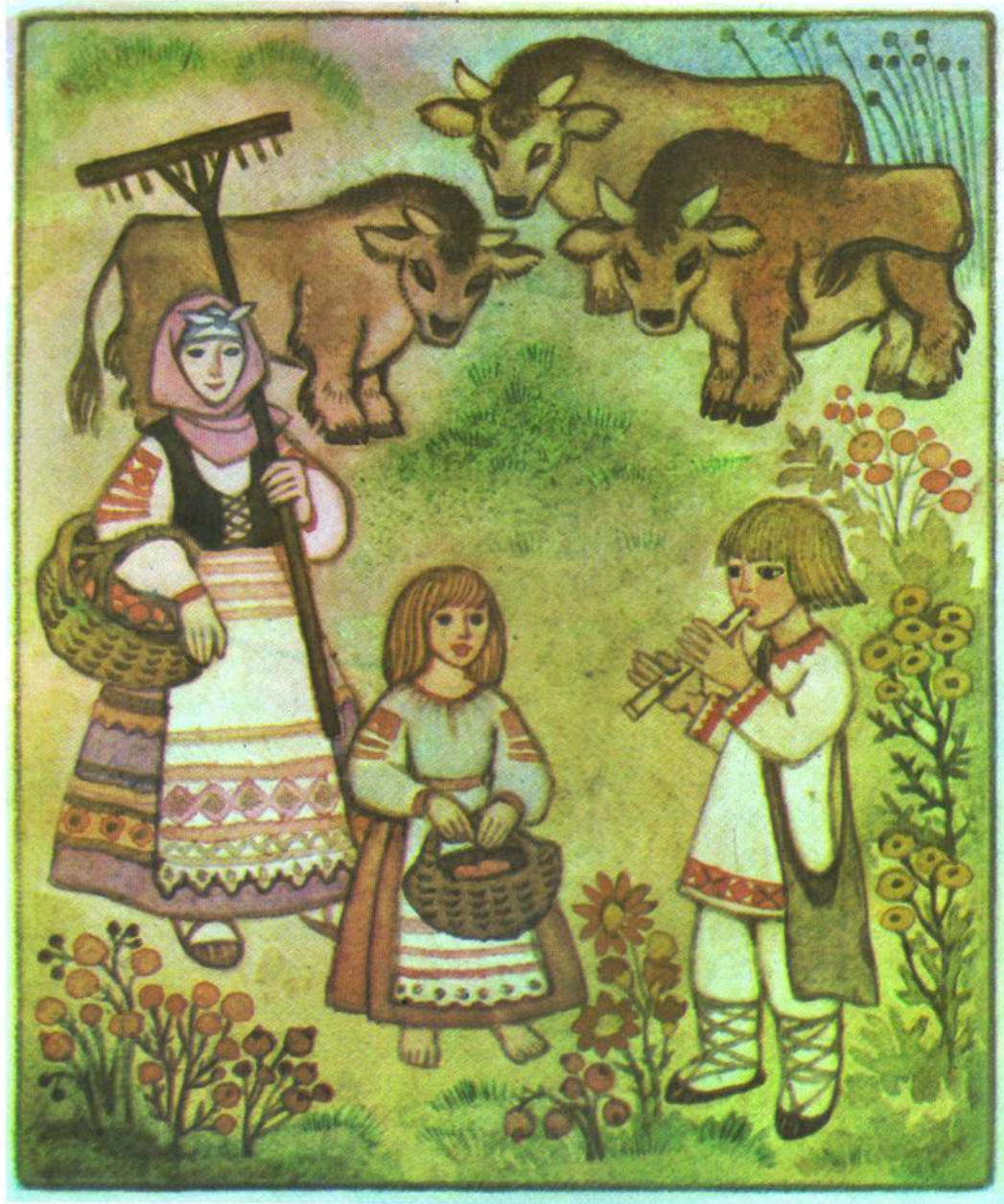
They sit and listen. And that's how they would like to sit all their lives, listening to the playing of the musician.

The pipe grows silent. But nobody dares to make a move, fearing to frighten away the magic voice resounding throughout the leafy forest, the oak wood, and the very heavens.

The flute is playing again, this time something sad. And now a yearning, a wistfulness grips everyone. It is late. Men and women are returning home after working for their landlord all day. They hear the music and spellbound stop to listen. Their entire lives pass before their eyes: their poverty, their grief, their fierce landlord and his evil henchmen. So sad do they become that they could wail, wail as one does over the deceased or on seeing sons off to serve in the army. Not only the women, but even the old and bearded men would wail.

But the musician begins to play a merry tune. The men and women throw down their rakes,





their pitchforks, put their hands on their hips and begin to whirl about in a swift dance.

The people dance, the horses dance, the trees in the leafy forest dance, the stars and the clouds dance — all are dancing and making merry.

That's the kind of magician our musician was — he did as he liked with our hearts.

The musician grew up. He made himself a fine violin and went wandering in the wide, wide world. Wherever he came, he would begin to play. The people gave him something to eat and drink for that. He was received as a most welcome guest. On leaving, he would be given something to take with him on the way.

Many a year did the musician wander about in the world, bringing joy to good people; as for the evil landlords he cut their hearts without a knife: wherever he came the people stopped obeying their landlords. He stood in the way of the landlords as a bone sticks in one's throat.

The landlords decided to do away with him. They tried to talk first one person, then another, into killing or drowning the musician. But nobody was willing.

The plain people loved the musician, but the landlords' henchmen feared him. For them he was a sorcerer.



The landlords, though, came to an agreement with the devils. It's common knowledge that landlords and devils are of one piece.

One day while the musician was walking through the forest, the devils set twelve hungry wolves loose on him. There they stood, blocking his way, their teeth chattering; their blood-shot eyes glittering like hot coals. The musician had nothing with him except the violin in his bag.

"Now," he thinks, "my end has come."

He takes his violin out of his bag to play just once again before he dies. Leaning against a tree, he puts his bow to the strings.

The violin begins to speak in a human voice. A whisper spreads throughout the forest. Not a movement in a bush or tree, not a leaf stirs. And the wolves, their jaws wide open, stand as if frozen to the ground.

With ears wide open they listen, and their hunger is forgotten.

The musician stops playing, and the wolves as if in a dream draw off.

The musician walks on. The sun has already set beyond the forest, though some golden streaks of light can yet be seen through the tree tops. So still it is that you can sow poppy-seed if you like.

The musician sits at the bank of the river,



takes out his violin from his bag and begins to play. So marvelous is his playing, that the earth and the heavens listen. And when he begins to play a polka, everything all around begins to dance. The stars fly about like snowflakes, the clouds swim across the sky, and the fish are having such a merry time that the river is boiling like water in a pot.

The Water King cannot resist the tempting music. He, too, begins to dance. And so swiftly does he whirl that the water overflows the river bank. The devils are frightened and leap out from the depths of the river. They are furious, their teeth chatter, but they are helpless against the musician.

The musician sees that the Water King has brought disaster to the people — the fields and the gardens are flooded. He stops his playing, puts his violin in his bag and walks on.

He walks and he walks and suddenly the landlord's two young sons come running up to him.

"We are having a party tonight," they say, "play for us, Mr. Musician. We'll pay you generously."

The musician considered a while — night was approaching, he had nowhere to sleep, and no money.

"Alright," he says, "I'll play for you."



The young gentlemen lead him into a castle. Very many young ladies and gentlemen are gathered there. And on a table he sees a kind of bowl. Large and deep is the bowl, and all the folk run up to it in turn, stick their fingers into it, then wipe their eyes.

The musician does the same: he comes up to the bowl, wets his fingers, smears his eyes, and no sooner has he done that, than he sees that the ladies and gentlemen are nothing but witches and devils. Not a castle this, but Hell!

“Aha!” the musician thinks. “So you’ve dragged me into Hell! Well! Well! Here’s a melody for you!”

He tunes his violin, strikes the living strings with his bow — and everything in Hell is at once shattered into pieces, and away scatter the devils and the witches.



THEIR FATHER'S GIFT



There was once a good man who had three sons — two were clever fellows, the third, they claimed, was a fool. The clever ones got married and raised families, but Ivan lay on the ledge on top of the stove and played on his reed-pipe.

There came a day when their father lay dying. He called his sons to his bedside and said to them:

“My boys, my dearly beloved sons! My time has come. I’m not leaving you great riches, but you must fulfil my last request: come to my grave to spend three nights there. The eldest son will come the first night, the second son — the second night, the youngest son — the third night. When you appear at the grave you will say: ‘Scatter, yellow sand! Open coffin, at my command! Arise, dear father, and stand!’”



Saying this to his sons, he crossed his hands and died.

The sons buried their father. It was the eldest one's turn to go and spend the night at the grave. But he was afraid, and in addition, his wife did not want him to go.

"Where do you think you're going? You'll rot away there and what'll become of me all alone?"

But to leave a father's last wish unfulfilled? No, that's evil!

"Send Ivan instead of you," she advised. "If anything should happen to him, no one will ever mourn for him."

The eldest son began to beg Ivan:

"Come on, be a good fellow, Ivan, and go to father's grave instead of me."

"Instead of you? No! I'm not a fool! I'll go when my own turn comes."

His brother was close to tears.

"But Ivan, dear, do go! You see, don't you, that my wife won't let me?"

"Well, all right!" Ivan agreed. "But you must tell your wife to make me a big sack and put two loaves of bread in it. There, at least, I'll have plenty of bread to eat. You see, at home your wives don't give me anything at all to eat."

The eldest brother's wife made a big sack and put two loaves of bread in it.



Ivan took the sack and went to his father's grave. When he got there, he repeated the words his father had taught him: "Scatter, yellow sand! Open coffin, at my command! Arise, dear father, and stand!"

In exactly that order did everything occur. His father arose, saw Ivan, and said:

"But where is my eldest son?"

"You see," Ivan replied, chewing on a hunk of bread, "he's afraid of you, so he sent me in his stead."

"Well," the father sighed, "then his share shall go to you. Listen carefully, sonny! On the silky turf in the green meadows there grazes a grey horse with a golden crest. In the day he grazes, in the night he makes merry. If you need him, whistle a loud call and the horse will appear at your side in the twinkling of an eye. When you need him no longer, set him free on the silky turf in the green meadows."

With these words his father lay down in his coffin and the grave immediately closed over him.

Ivan walked away from the grave, whistled a loud call and lo! there was the grey horse with the golden crest galloping up to him!

"Name your wish, Ivan Ivanovich!"

"I wish to take a ride!"



“Get on my back!”

Ivan mounted the horse and off they flew. They flew round the world three times without even touching the ground. Then they returned home.

“That’ll do for now!” Ivan said to the horse. “We’ve had our fun. Return to the silky turf in the green meadows. In the day you can graze, in the night you can amuze yourself, but when I call, you must come to me at a gallop!”

He set the horse free, and himself walked to the hut, his sack across his shoulders. He climbed up onto the top of the stove, rested his feet on the perch there and played on his reed-pipe. His clever brothers were amazed:

“Just look at him! He’s returned safe and sound!”

The second night came. The second son had to get ready to go to their father’s grave. He began pleading with Ivan:

“Come, my dear boy, you go instead of me.”

“What do you think me,— a fool to do your work?” Ivan said angrily. “It’s your turn now, so you must go!”

His brother’s wife began to weep, and she begged Ivan:

“Ivan, dear boy, do us a favour and go to your father’s grave instead of your brother.”



"All right," agreed Ivan, "but give me two loaves of bread!"

They packed the sack for him and he left.

He came to the grave, spoke the necessary words. His father arose from the grave and again was greatly surprised.

"Why hasn't my second son come?"

"He's afraid of you," replied Ivan, "that's why."

"In that case," sighed the father, "his share, too, shall go to you. Listen to me carefully, sonny. On the silky turf in those same green meadows there is yet another horse, a brown one, and he's younger than the first. Now, he too shall serve you."

Ivan flew twice round the world on the back of the brown horse and returned to his hut.

Now the third night it was his own turn to go to their father's grave. When he appeared there his father arose and said:

"I feel sorry for you, sonny. Only you come to me... Well, then the third one, the youngest horse also shall serve you. And he grazes on the same silky turf in the very same green meadows. He's a light bay. And now, don't come to me any more."

Saying this, his father lay down in his coffin and the grave closed over him.

This time, mounted on the light bay, Ivan



flew once round the world. Then he returned to his hut, lay down on the stove ledge and played on his reed-pipe.

“Well, well!” the clever brothers exclaimed in surprise. “Our fool returns home unharmed each time. Now we shan’t give him two loaves of bread a day. A plate of soup will do for him!”

In that tsardom at this time the Tsar’s daughter, his youngest, had nothing to busy herself with, and she did a queer thing: she climbed out onto the balcony on the third level of their palace, sat near a window and announced that the man who on horseback could jump up and land on the balcony beside her, was the man she would take for her husband. Hearing this, all those who would have liked to have a Tsar’s daughter for a wife, dashed off to the capital. Many people went there on foot, and some in coaches to witness that marvelous feat.

The clever brothers said:

“We, too, want to see that miracle. Let’s go!”

They began to prepare for the journey. Ivan begged his brothers to take him along with them.

“I, too, want to see this miracle.”

“You want to go there? What for?” his brothers mocked him. “They can get along there



without such fools as you!” And if you are tired of lying on the stove, we’ll give you work to do.”

They took a big basket filled to the top with poppy-seed and another big basket filled to the top with sand, mixed them together and said:

“You must sort out the poppy-seed from the sand by the time we return!”

This made Ivan sad, but he had to do it. He poured the mixture into the sack, lay down on top of the stove and there he remained.

Two weeks passed. Ivan climbed down from the stove, poured the poppy-seed and sand mixture into a bast-basket, covered it with his sack and went off with his possessions towards the dense forest and beyond, out into open country where his horses were grazing. He whistled his loud call and all the three horses — the grey, the brown and the light bay — came galloping up to him.

“Name your wish, Our Lord and Master!”

“My dear horses, there are rumours that something miraculous is to take place in the Tsar’s capital. His youngest daughter is sitting at the window of the balcony on the third level of the palace, waiting for a man on horseback who will leap up high enough to land at her side, for he is the man she will marry! Can you take me there to see the miracle?”



“We can,” the grey horse answered. “This time you will ride on our youngest brother, the light bay.”

The light bay stepped forward, wagged his tail and said:

“Climb into my right ear, and climb out of my left.”

Ivan got into the light bay’s right ear and out of his left. Now he was bressed so splendidly that not a single Tsarevich or Prince could compare with him.

He mounted the horse, the horse stamped and off they flew.

Whether the flight was long or short, is not known, but there they were in the capital already! Everybody had gathered to watch the miracle. And Ivan’s brothers were there, too, standing aside, their mouths wide open in wonder.

The light bay leaped upwards at a very high speed, but he failed by an elbow’s length to reach the Tsarevna. He landed on the ground behind the palace and flew away with the wind. Here — and gone, in the same instant!

The people gasped, the Tsarevna exclaimed: “Catch him! Oh! Catch him!” But who could?

The horse returned home at a gallop. Ivan climbed into his left ear and came out of his right, his own self again, and he said:



“Many thanks, my brave horse! And I, too, have looked at the Tsarevna! Help me once again! Sort out the poppy-seed from the sand.”

“Tear your sack into two halves,” the horse said, “and pour out the mixture from your basket.”

Ivan did that. No sooner did the horse blow his nostrils, than the poppy-seed landed on one half and the sand on the other.

Ivan tied the sheets, thanked his horse and left for the hut. On the way he gathered mushrooms and filled his basket with them.

At home his sisters-in-law fell upon him:

“Where’ve you been, you simpleton! How about the poppy-seed and the sand? Sorted out already? You’ll get it yet from your brothers when they return.”

“Oh, the devil take you!” Ivan said. “I’ve separated the poppy-seed from the sand, and in addition brought you mushrooms. And still you say I don’t do anything.”

The clever brothers returned from the capital, full of the news.

“The sights we saw there! Nobody could reach even to the second level. There was only one, an unknown Tsarevich, on a light bay, who almost reached the Tsarevna. If only he had leaped but an elbow’s length higher...! What a pity. Such





a handsome Tsarevich! Even the Tsarevna shouted 'Catch him! Catch him!' But no one could, so fast did he fly!"

And there on top of the stove lay Ivan and teased them:

"You didn't think it was me you saw there, did you?"

The brothers were shocked at the idea.

"What a fool! You'd better keep your mouth shut!"

Some time passed and the Tsarevna again announced: everyone should again arrive in the capital. This time she was sitting at the window of the balcony on the fourth level of the palace.

The brothers were getting their things ready to leave.

"Take me along with you!" Ivan begged.

"Get on with you, you big fool! Haven't you got enough work to do at home? Here's something for you to do."

The brothers took three baskets filled to the top with poppy-seed and three with sand, mixed them and ordered Ivan to sort out the seed from the sand by the time they returned.

Ivan waited a while, poured the poppy-seed and sand mixture into his basket, took the two pieces of his torn-up sack and went to the dense forest and beyond, out into open country. He whist-



led his loud call and lo! there were the fine horses galloping up to him.

"Why have you called us, Our Lord and Master?"

"The Tsarevna has again commanded," said Ivan, "that everybody should appear in the capital. Can I go and watch the marvelous feat?"

"Of course!" the grey horse answered. "And this time you shall ride on the brown horse."

Ivan repeated the usual procedure. Now a most handsome man mounted the brown horse and flew off towards the capital. If it had taken everybody a month or two to get there, it took Ivan an hour. He came just in time.

The brown horse leaped up very high, but he failed to reach the Tsarevna by only half an elbow's length.

Curiosity got the better of the Tsarevna — who on earth was that brave Tsarevich who for the second time had almost but not quite reached her?

So after a while she repeated her announcement and herself climbed up to the fifth level. Again came all the Tsars and Tsareviches, all the Kings and Princes, all the landlords and noblemen. The clever brothers also arrived in the capital. But Ivan they left at home with plenty of



work to do: this time he had to sort out a mixture they'd made of four baskets filled to the top with poppy-seed and four with sand!

Ivan lay on the stove ledge as long as he liked, took the poppy-seed and sand mixture and went to his horses.

"Can I go to the capital again?" he asked the horses.

"Of course!" the grey horse answered. "And this time you'll ride on me. If I don't leap high enough to land at the side of the Tsarevna, we shall drop the subject altogether."

Ivan repeated the usual procedure, mounted his horse, and flew off to the capital. In less than an hour's time he was there.

"Now, hold on!" the grey horse shouted.

The grey horse neighed, and his neighing was heard throughout the capital, and he shot up at such a speed that he landed at the very feet of the Tsarevna. In an instant the Tsarevna — TAP-TAP — and imprinted two seals on Ivan — one on his forehead, one on the back of his head!

The horse sprang down, landed on the earth and dashed off. Gone in the twinkling of an eye!

The people shouted: "Catch him! Catch him!" But there was no one to catch! Now here — now gone!



Ivan raced back home, asked his horse to sort out the poppy-seed from the sand, and set him free on the silky turf of the green meadows. As for himself, he pulled his hat down over his ears to hide the seals, and went to the hut. On the way he picked mushrooms, a whole basketful.

The brothers arrived back home and began to tell their wives about the miracle they had witnessed.

“Oh! The things we saw there! Unbelievable! The Tsarevna’s suitors all leaped high on their horses, but not high enough to reach the second level even. Only one Tsarevich, such a handsome fellow...! dressed all in gold...! leaped high enough, and he landed at the very feet of the Tsarevna, and she imprinted her seals on him — one on his forehead and one on the back of his head.”

Lying on the stove ledge, Ivan laughed.

“You didn’t think it was me, did you?”

“Oh! Shut up, you fool! You haven’t got the brains or the cunning to do anything like that! How about the poppy-seed? Sorted out?”

“Yes! The devil take you and your poppy-seed! A hell of a lot of trouble with it and nothing else!”

The brothers looked and marveled: all that poppy-seed sorted out from the sand, such a lot of it! How had Ivan done it?



“You must have worked very hard!” they said.

In the meantime the Tsarevna demanded that her bridgeroom should appear before her. At first she called the Tsareviches and the Princes, and examined them — her bridegroom was not among them. Then she called the landowners and the merchants... not among them either. Now it was the turn for the peasants and farm-hands. She ordered all of them to be brought before her.

“Well,” Ivan said to his brothers, “before I asked you to take me along with you, but now I shall go there without you!”

He took his reed-pipe, threw his sack across his shoulder, went to the dense forest and beyond, out into open country. He whistled his loud call — and all the three horses came running to him.

“My good horses,” Ivan said, “the Tsarevna has ordered all the peasants and farm-hands to appear before her. Perhaps I can go to see her?”

The grey horse answered:

“Now you will again ride on the youngest of us. Go there just as you are.” And the light bay he ordered:

“Take him, brother, to the bathhouse that is near the Tsar’s palace, and leave him there. And



you,” addressing Ivan, “will lie on the ledge in the bathhouse and play on your pipe. When needed, they’ll find you.”

In the twinkling of an eye the light bay delivered him to the bathhouse. Ivan entered the bathhouse, climbed onto the ledge and played on his reed-pipe.

The Tsarevna and her maid had by this time examined all the peasants and hired farm-hands, but the bridegroom was not among them. Suddenly they heard music from the bathhouse, and such music that to listen was to marvel.

They went to the bathhouse, opened it, and saw a young fellow in rags and unkempt, lying on the ledge, his hat pushed down over his forehead. His playing was so wonderful that one’s feet of their own accord started skipping and dancing. The Tsarevna came up to him, removed his shabby hat and — yes! — there was the seal she had stamped on his forehead! She looked at the back of his head — there, too, her seal!

“Well,” she said to Ivan, “so it’s you who are my betrothed! Come! We shall go to my Father.”

She took him by the hand to lead him out, but Ivan would not move.

“Why should I go there? To have people mock at me?”



Somehow the Tsarevna did bring him to the Tsar's chamber.

"Who on earth have you chosen for your husband?" the Tsar exclaimed, reproach in his voice.

"But my seals are on him," his daughter replied, "and that means that he's the man predestined for me. It's my fate! I can't help it!"

Whether it was to the Tsar's liking or not, but the wedding ceremony did take place. Ivan became the son-in-law of a Tsar!

The Tsar had two other sons-in-law, the husbands of his elder daughters, and they, of course, were of the nobility.

One day the Tsar ordered his wealthy sons-in-law to appear before him.

"I am an old man already," the Tsar said to them. "And death is not far away. To which of you shall I bequeath my tsardom?"

"To me!" said one son-in-law.

And so heatedly did they argue they almost began to fight.

"Now listen to me, my beloved sons-in-law," the Tsar said to them. "In a far-distant kingdom in a far-distant country there is a pig whose bristles are of gold. She ploughs with her snout, harrows with her hooves, leaves in her wake pies ready to eat! Pies to make your mouth water! Pies for a



Tsar! He who can capture that pig and bring her to me in my palace is the son-in-law to whom I shall bequeath my tsardom."

The sons-in-law wasted no time. They each took a regiment of soldiers and marched off to the accompaniment of music, to search for the pig with the gold bristles.

The Tsar's youngest daughter said to her husband:

"Your brothers-in-law have gone in search of the pig with the gold bristles. And you? What are you going to do? Father will bequeath his entire tsardom to them. How shall we live then?"

"I won't go anywhere!" was Ivan's response. "To the devil with that pig! Who invented her? Where am I to find her?"

His wife began to weep, but Ivan took up his reed-pipe and began to play on it.

A month or so passed and Ivan said to his wife:

"Go to your father and ask him for a mare, any old mare of no use to anybody, and I'll go in search of the pig."

"Oh! you fool!" his wife said. "Your brothers-in-law have probably found her long ago and are leading her homewards, and you!— you are thinking of leaving only now!"



“Don’t worry about them! Go to your father and if he won’t agree to give that mare, I’ll go on foot.”

His wife did go to her father.

“Father dear,” she said, “my Ivan asks you to give him a mare, a worthless one. He, too, wishes to go in search of the pig.”

The Tsar laughed but he gave the mare.

Ivan mounted the mare back frontward and drove off.

“Just look at him!” the startled servants cried. “Look, our fool is sitting with his back frontward! A fool rides like a fool!”

Ivan left the city behind him, cast the mare to the wolves, and whistled his loud call—all the three horses came galloping up to him—the grey, the brown, the light bay.

“Name your wish, Our Lord and Master!”

“My dear horses!” Ivan said, “In a far-distant kingdom, in a far-distant country there lives a pig whose bristles are of gold. She ploughs with her snout, harrows with her hooves, leaves in her wake piles of pies! And what delicious pies! Pies for a Tsar! Can’t we go and find her?”

“Of course,” the grey horse answered, “we can! You’ll go to search for the pig riding our youngest brother. And you must take with you a silk cord and a leather whip.”

“But where am I to get them?”



“Just a moment!”

The grey horse reared and flew off to the green meadows, he was back in a jiffy with a leather whip and a silk cord.

“Here you are! This is all you need! See to it that you flog the pig hard with the whip until she surrenders, and you, our light bay, will in the meantime thrash her with your hooves.”

Ivan came into the right ear of the light bay and out of the left. What a fine-looking man he was now! He mounted the horse — in an instant they were lost to sight.

They flew long or not, who knows? But there they were in the country where the gold-bristled pig lived. Ivan looked at her, and she was, in truth, ploughing with her snout and harrowing with her hooves. He stole up to her and began to flog her! The horse thrashed her with his hooves, Ivan flogged her with his whip! The pig stood it till she could stand it no longer — her strength had failed her.

“Oh my! Oh!” she cried. “Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich, our Tsar from over the seas, you are killing me!”

“Surrender!” shouted Ivan. “Otherwise I shall kill you! I shan’t let you go alive!”

He kept on flogging the pig until she did surrender. He made a noose of the silk cord, lassoed



the pig, mounted the light bay, rode off, and the pig came running after.

On and on they rode until they came across two regiments of soldiers marching along, accompanied by music.

"Well," thought Ivan, "those are probably my brothers-in-law still searching for the pig."

He came into the bay's left ear, out of the right, and was his usual self again. The horse he set free, the pig he tied by the cord to an oak. The pig began busying herself in the usual way: with her snout she ploughed, with her hooves she harrowed.

Ivan made a camp-fire in the oak-grove, sat there warming himself and playing on his reed-pipe.

The brothers-in-law came up closer and saw smoke coming from the oak-grove. They said to their servants:

"Go and find out what's smoking there."

The servants went over, found out what was what, got a light at the fire and returned.

"Well, what did you find out?" the brothers wanted to know.

"It's our fool, you know, making that smoke," the servants said. "He's already leading the pig home."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the brothers-in-law. "Let's go and see for ourselves. If it's really



so, we'll beg him for the pig, or else take her away."

They came to the oak-grove and — yes! — there was Ivan sitting near the fire, playing on his pipe, and the pig was busy working near the oak tree...

"Greetings, brother-in-law!"

"Greetings!"

"So you've managed to get the pig ahead of us!"

"I took only one. There's a whole herd of them, enough for you, too."

"That's a lie, brother-in-law! There's only one such pig in the world. Give us the pig!"

But Ivan stood his ground.

"This is my pig, and I myself shall lead her to my father-in-law."

The brothers-in-law nagged and nagged, to get rid of them was impossible!

"We'll give you," they said, "this and that..."

"Well, to the devil with you! You can have the pig if you agree to cut off the little toes from your right feet in exchange for her."

The brothers-in-law thought a while and agreed. And why not? One's little toe is worth half a tsardom! They cut off their little toes, took the gold-bristled pig, and merrily led her to the capital, delighted at their good luck.



Ivan put the toes in his money-bag, warmed himself yet a while at the fire, called his bay and mounted him and raced off. The brothers-in-law travelled to the capital a month perhaps, but Ivan arrived there within a day. In the city he set the bay free in the green meadows and himself went on to his wife.

Seeing Ivan coming empty-handed, his wife threw up her hands in dismay!

“But where is father’s mare?”

“You see,” Ivan said, “she turned out to be a very bad mare. I had trouble with her on the way and left her there and returned on foot.”

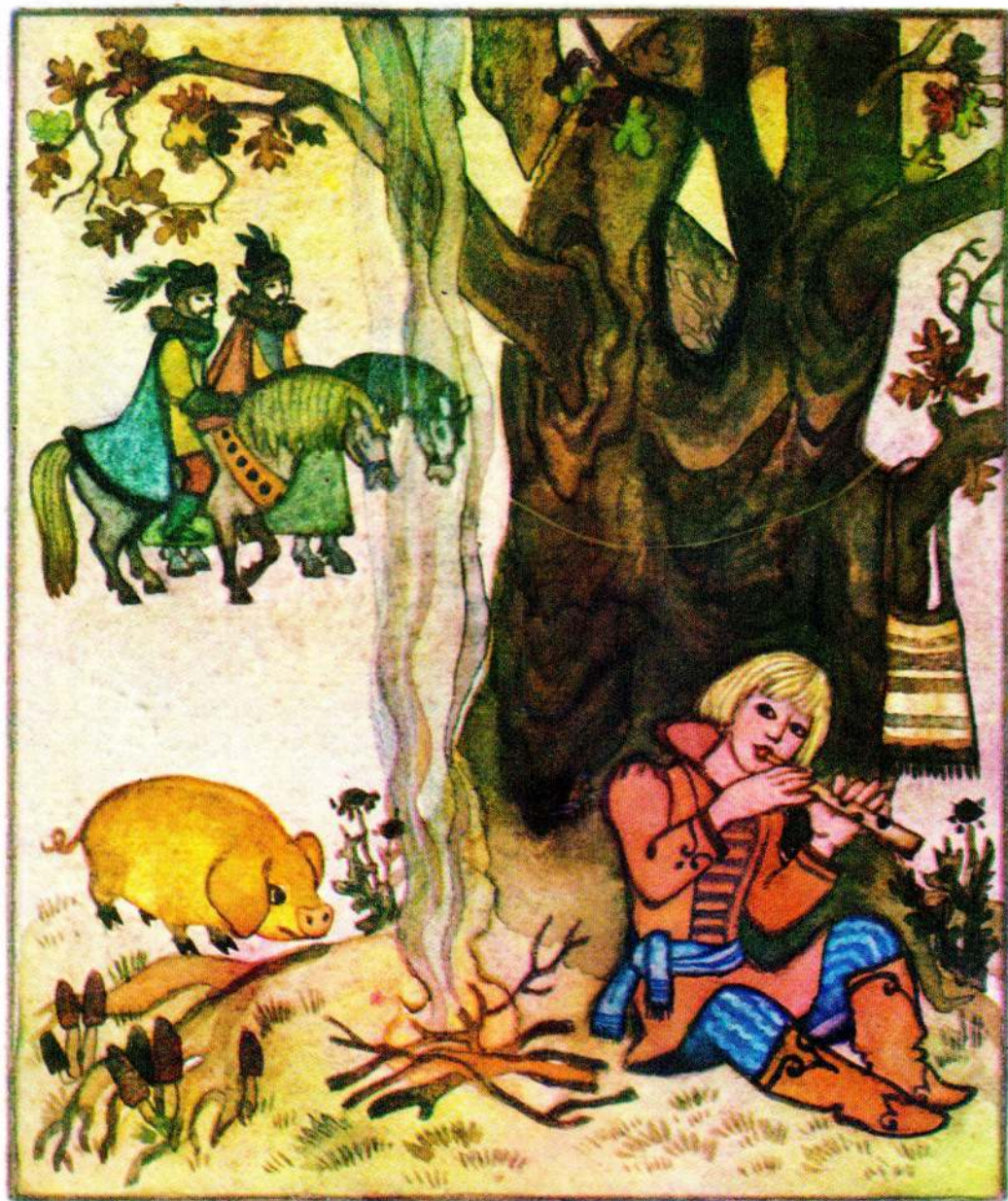
His wife burst into tears:

“Oh! How bitter my life with you! I had to beg Father so hard for the mare! And you’ve gone and lost her! Nor have you brought the pig!”

The brothers-in-law returned leading the pig. They tied her to a tree in the courtyard near the Tsar’s palace, and she began performing her miracle: with her snout she ploughed, with her hooves she harrowed, and behind her appeared piles of pies ready to eat!

How happy were the brothers-in-law and the Tsar! He invited many guests from among the princes and landlords to see the miracle. No Tsar had ever before had such a pig!





The guests left for their homes and the brothers-in-law went to the Tsar to ask him to bequeath his tsardom to them.

The Tsar thought a while and said:

“To give away my tsardom for a pig! That’s asking for too much! In a far-distant kingdom, in a far-distant country there is a most extraordinary filly. Her nostrils emit flames, her ears smoke. She grazes on the silky turf in the green meadows. And twelve horses with golden crests guard her. If you can capture that filly and the horses and bring them to me, then I’ll bequeath my tsardom to you.”

The brothers-in-law hesitated, but they had no choice. They had to go in search of the filly.

They gathered an even larger army than they’d had before and left.

Again Ivan’s wife began nagging him:

“Your brothers-in-law have gone in search of the filly, but you!.. You are still at home! Father will bequeath his entire tsardom to them, and how shall we live then?”

“Oh!” said Ivan. “Where can I go? Have I an army, or what? We’ll manage to get on without a tsardom.”

Some time passed and Ivan said to his wife:

“Go to your father, perhaps he’ll give me a mare again. Then I’ll follow my brothers-in-law.”



“Oh! You fool! Are you mad? Your brothers-in-law are probably leading the filly home already! And you want to go now?”

“If they are already returning, then I’ll return together with them. No harm done!”

“I don’t want to go to Father again and bother him,” his wife said. “You’ll lose the mare anyway and bring nothing in return. What shall I say to Father then?”

“If I lose her that will be the end of her. It won’t make your father any the poorer.”

She went to her father and begged him for another mare. Ivan mounted the mare, and on leaving the city behind him cast her to the wolves to be eaten. As for himself, he whistled his loud call and there stood his good horses. Ivan told them about the wonderful filly.

“But that’s our mother!” the grey horse exclaimed. “Although nine horses guard her now, not twelve, since we three serve you. You have given us a difficult task, Our Lord and Master, but we shall do our best to help you. Go to your father-in-law and ask him for his grandfather’s steelyard that weighs 500 lbs.”

Ivan returned to the Tsar’s chambers. He begged the Tsar for the steelyard. Ivan picked up the steelyard, waved it as if it were a thin reed. The Tsar was amazed!



“A simpleton,” he said, “but how strong! Just look at him!”

Ivan came back to his horses.

“Now I myself,” said the grey horse, “shall carry you on my back. But be on the alert! As soon as you mount the filly you must begin to beat her between the ears with the steelyard, and beat her until she falls. In the meantime I shall fly around her saying, ‘Surrender, dear Mother, for Our Lord and Master is an evil one — he’ll beat you to death with his steelyard...’”

All took place just as the grey horse had foretold. No sooner did Ivan mount the filly than she reared and lifted him to the very heavens. But all her efforts to throw him were in vain. He sat on her back, beating her between the ears with the heavy steelyard.

The filly was exhausted and said:

“Thirty-three years have I lived on this earth, but nobody has ever yet ridden me! Who are you?”

“He is Our Lord and Master, Mother dear,” the grey horse answered instead of Ivan. “Surrender, for he is very cruel, he’ll kill you!”

“I’ve known freedom,” the filly said, “now I’ll have a taste of captivity. Stop! Stop beating me, Ivan Ivanovich!”

“You should have said that long ago! My hand aches already, beating you so hard!”



Ivan rode to his tsardom on the filly and in his wake came the nine horses with Ivan's grey horse making the tenth.

Suddenly an army came dragging along, accompanied by music.

"It must be my brothers-in-law on their way back," Ivan thought. He set his grey horse free in the green meadows, laid a camp fire, warmed himself by the fire and played on his reed-pipe.

His brothers-in-law noticed smoke. They sent servants to find out what was smoking. The servants looked around, got a light at the fire and went back.

"Well, who's there?" the brothers-in-law wanted to know.

"It's our fool! He's leading the filly and nine golden-crested horses are surrounding her."

"How is that — nine horses? Our father-in-law said there were twelve."

"No! Only nine."

"Then let's go over ourselves and make sure."

They came over:

"Hello, brother-in-law!"

"Hello!"

"What's that you have there? Not the filly!"

"That's right! There are many grazing in the meadows. I took only one for myself and nine horses into the bargain."



The brothers-in-law glanced at each other and shook their heads.

"That'll do, brother-in-law! You're mocking us. This is the filly that our father had in mind."

"Not at all. This is another one," Ivan insisted. "Yours is still there. I don't take what doesn't belong to me."

"Perhaps that's so," the brothers said. "Nevertheless let us have this one. We'll give you anything you wish in exchange for her."

And how they begged! Ivan gave in.

"Well, you can have her, but in exchange for her you must each cut off the little finger from your right hands."

The brothers-in-law regretted having to lose their little fingers, but Ivan stood his ground. The brothers-in-law talked it over:

"Well," they said. "We have our own doctors and our own medicines. Before you know it, all will have healed. Yes! We'll cut off our little fingers."

Ivan returned home empty-handed again.

"But tell me at least what you've done with father's mare!" his wife said.

"What do you mean — what? She croaked, that's what! What else could you expect? She was carrying me on her back and also the 500 lb steelyard."



In a few hours the brothers-in-law came home with the filly. Their happiness knew no bounds. It was clear the tsardom would now be theirs! The Tsar would have to draw up the papers that would hand over the tsardom to his two sons-in-law.

“Not yet!” said the Tsar. “I’ve changed my mind. There’s something more you must do! In a far-distant tsardom, in a far-distant country, beyond the blue seas, beyond the high mountains, there lives a lion. He sits at a well, bound in chains, twelve of them! Day and night twelve people draw water for him from the well. The lion drinks it all and with that water he swallows down all the illnesses that the people and the cattle suffer from. If you can capture that lion and bring him to our tsardom everything shall then be yours!”

The brothers-in-law thought it over:

“Perhaps the fool will manage to get the lion, too, and we’ll somehow coax him into giving us the lion.”

“Agreed!” they said. “We’ll bring the lion!”

They got everything ready and departed. Ivan’s wife began nagging him again.

“And now, my fool, aren’t you going to do anything? There you lie, playing on your reed-pipe. Nothing bothers you! The brothers-in-law



are gone to get the lion. Father will bequeath his entire tsardom to them, and you and I shall have to go begging alms!”

“Dearest, there are people who live by begging, aren’t there? We, too, shall somehow manage to go on living!”

His wife had to be contented with that.

After a month or two had passed, Ivan again asked his wife to go and ask her father for a mare.

“I won’t!” his wife said. “If go you must, then go on foot. What’s the use of your going? Whatever you do comes to naught anyway.”

Ivan did not begin to argue. He took leave of his wife and started off. When he got out into open country, he called his horses. The grey horse said to him:

“Now you will ride the brown horse. As soon as you arrive in the capital, set the horse free, go to the well and say that you take it upon yourself to water the lion. And if the Tsar hires you, look sharp! Here is a hammer that will break any chain.”

It did not take Ivan long to get to the well, of course. He was there in about three hours.

“Good afternoon, my good fellows!” Ivan addressed the men, working at the well.

“Good afternoon!”



"It's hard work you have here, not so?"

"Oh! How hard!"

"Then let me do it instead of you."

"No! No!" the workers refused him. "We are twelve and even so can hardly manage."

"Don't worry. I'll manage... Go and tell your Tsar."

The foreman went to the Tsar and told him. The Tsar was only too glad — to pay only one man would cost so much less!

"Take him on for a three day's trial," the Tsar said. "If he can do the work alone, then we'll come to an agreement with him."

The workers left the well and Ivan began working hurriedly. So smoothly did his work go, nothing better could be wished for.

The foreman ran to the Tsar.

"It's a miracle!" he said. "The lion doesn't even drink all the water he alone gives him."

"Well then," the Tsar said. "Let's wait and see how things will go tomorrow."

At night Ivan said to the lion:

"You know what? Let's escape from here! You'll find life is better in my tsardom."

He praised his tsardom so highly that the lion soon agreed to run away with him.

"But you won't be able to break the chains that keep me bound to the well."



“Don’t worry, I’ll break them!”

Ivan took the hammer and with one stroke of the hammer one chain was split in pieces. He struck twelve times and the twelve chains were split in pieces!

Ivan sat on the lion’s back and dashed off to his tsardom. On the way he met the brothers-in-law. When they saw Ivan riding the lion, they began begging for the lion.

“Give us the lion, do!”

“Oh, oh!” Ivan wouldn’t agree. “Everything for you! Let me, too, bring something to our father-in-law. My wife, you see, reproaches me. She says you are going to get the tsardom and she and I will have to go begging alms!”

“We’ll give you whatever you wish, Ivan, but give us the lion.”

They persuaded Ivan at last, and he agreed to give them the lion, but he added they would have to pay a higher price this time.

“Each one of you must cut a strip of skin from your back for me.”

The brothers-in-law had no objections.

“We have our own doctors and our own medicines,” they thought. “Our wounds will heal quickly. The tsardom will surely be ours now. Then we can drive both the Tsar and this fool here out of the tsardom.”





Ivan cut off the two strips of skin, rolled them up and put them in his pocket. When the brothers-in-law were gone, Ivan called his brown horse, mounted him and flew off for home.

When Ivan returned the servants made fun of him.

“Look!” they said. “Three days he went hunting the lion on foot! Oh! What a fool our fool! Trying to measure his strength with wise fellows!”

And his wife wept.

“Whatever are you thinking of? The people are laughing at you!”

“Let them laugh, not everybody must cry!”

“But how you’ll cry when Father bequeaths his tsardom to your brothers-in-law, and we’ll get nothing!”

“But whatever for do we need that tsardom? Let him give us a small plot of land, that’ll do for us.”

She calmed down a bit — you can’t weep all the time! There aren’t enough tears to go round.

The brothers-in-law brought the lion home, with music and with songs they brought him. From everywhere in the tsardom princes and landowners gathered to see the wonderful lion. The Tsar was so happy he arranged a banquet the like of which no one had seen.

Three days and three nights the people rejoiced



and feasted. As soon as the banquet was over, the Tsar called his sons-in-law to appear before him. They came with their wives and the Tsar's youngest daughter. But Ivan stayed away.

"And where is your fool?" the Tsar inquired of his youngest daughter. Why hasn't he come? He'd at least hear how I'm going to divide my tsardom."

She went in search of her husband.

"Ivan, you must come to our Father to hear what he's going to do."

"What for? And why?"

"Go and ask him to give us at least a small plot of land."

Ivan went to the Tsar's chamber, took his place at the threshold, and there he stood.

The Tsar said to his elder sons-in-law:

"Here, my beloved sons-in-law, I bequeath to you my entire tsardom, and here I shall remain, dependent on your kindness. You shall feed me in turn until death shall take me."

"We thank you, dear father," and the sons-in-law bowed.

"And what are you giving me, Father?" Ivan inquired from the threshold where he was still standing.

"Nothing! Tsardoms are not earned lying on a stove."



Ivan glanced at his brothers-in-law and said: "And what have they done that you are giving them your tsardom?"

"What have they done?" said the Tsar, astonished. "They have brought me marvels from abroad."

"Where did they get them? From me! By begging and how! Look, Father, and see whether they have the little toes on their right feet."

"Come on, off with your boots!" the Tsar commanded.

The sons-in-law took them off — yes! — no little toes on their right feet.

Ivan opened his money-bag and took out the little toes from there.

"Here they are! This I got from them for the pig. And now, Father, look and see whether they have their little fingers on their right hands."

The Tsar looked — yes! — no little fingers there! But Ivan took them out from that very same money-bag of his.

"And this I got from them for the filly. But they cheated you: they brought only nine horses. Where are the other three?"

"That's so!" the Tsar scratched the back of his head. "They deceived me. Three horses are missing..."

At this moment Ivan left the palace, whistled



his wonderful call, and lo! before them stood the three horses with golden crests. The Tsar stared, speechless. While the sons-in-law became white as a sheet.

“And now,” Ivan said, “look and see, Father, whether the skin on their backs is whole.”

The Tsar looked: yes...! Strips of skin were cut out!

Ivan took out the two strips from his money-bag, applied them to their backs — their skins!

“This, Father, I did to them they should remember the lion.”

Everything become clear to the Tsar. Here was the truth! He banished the imposters, his deceitful sons-in-law, and gave his entire tsardom to Ivan.



PUSSY GOLDEN FOREHEAD



Once upon a time there lived an old man and an old woman. They were very poor and had nothing to eat and nothing to wear.

One day the old woman says to the old man:

“Look here, old man, go to the forest, cut down an oak-tree, bring it to the market, sell it and buy two pounds of flour.”

So the old man took his axe, went to the forest and began to cut down an oak.

All of a sudden, a cat springs out from inside the tree, and not an ordinary one at that, but a pussy with a golden forehead, golden ear, silver ear, golden strand of wool, silver strand of wool, golden paw, silver paw.

“Old man, what do you want?”

“Well, you see, Pussy sweet, my old woman has sent me to cut down an oak, take it to the



market, sell it and buy two pounds of flour.”

“Go home, old man, you’ll have your flour!”

The old man came home and — can you believe it? — a whole corn-bin full of flour!

The old woman bakes some bread, eats till she can eat no more, feeds her old man and says to him:

“It would be nice to eat some milk soup with dumplings. But we haven’t got any salt. So take your axe, go to the forest and strike at the oak — maybe Pussy Golden Forehead will reappear: beg her for some salt.”

The old man took the axe, went to the forest, and struck at the oak...! Out came pussy golden forehead, golden ear, silver ear, golden strand of wool, silver strand of wool.

“Old man, old man, what do you want?”

“You see, Pussy sweet, we’ve got bread now, but we haven’t got any salt.”

“Go home, old man, you’ll have your salt!”

The old man came home and — can you believe it? — a whole vat full of salt!

The old woman cooks the milk soup with dumplings, has her fill, feeds the old man and says to him:

“It would be nice to have some cabbage now.





So, sharpen your axe, old man, go to the forest, strike at the oak — maybe Pussy Golden Forehead will reappear — beg her for some cabbage.”

The old man sharpened the axe, went to the forest and struck at the oak... Out came pussy golden forehead, golden ear, silver ear, golden strand of wool, silver strand of wool, golden paw, silver paw.

“Old man, old man, what do you want?”

“You see, Pussy sweet, we’ve got bread, we’ve got salt — but we haven’t got any cabbage.”

“Go home, old man, you’ll have your cabbage!”

The old man came home and — can you believe it? — a whole tub full of cabbage!

The old woman says:

“My oh my, how nice! Now, if we had some lard, I could have cooked cabbage-soup and seasoned it with fried lard. Don’t be lazy, old man, take the axe, go to the forest, strike the oak, maybe Pussy Golden Forehead will reappear: ask her for some lard.”

So the old man took the axe, went to the forest, struck at the oak... Out came pussy golden forehead, golden ear, silver ear, golden strand of wool, silver strand of wool, golden paw, silver paw.

“Old man, old man, what do you want?”

“You see, Pussy sweet, my old woman asks



for some lard to season the cabbage-soup with."

"Alright, old man, go home. You'll have your lard!"

The old man came home and — can you believe it? — a whole vat full of lard!

The old man is happy and so is the old woman. To this day they live, eating cabbage-soup seasoned with fried lard and bread to their hearts' content and tell tales to you and me!



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